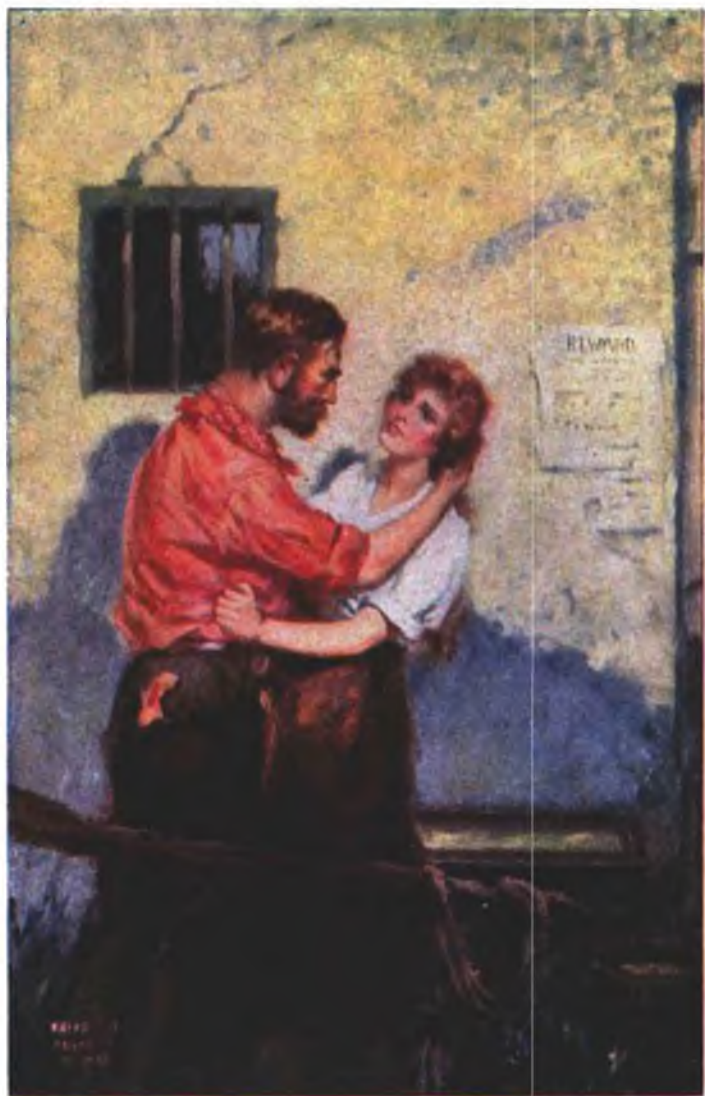


TURQUOISE CAÑON

J. ALLAN DUNN

TURQUOISE CAÑON



“He had caught her up in his arms and . . . was gradually forcing her face upward to meet his own . . .”

Turquoise Cañon

By
I. ALLAN DUNN



FRONTISPIECE BY
RALPH PALLEN COLEMAN

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**TO MY FRIEND
THOMAS F. CONLIN
PITTSFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS**

CONTENTS

| CHAPTER | PAGE |
|---------------------------------------|------|
| I. Double-Eagles | 3 |
| II. Deborah Dane | 14 |
| III. A Sheared Lamb and Some Goats. | 31 |
| IV. The Eleven-Thirty Train . . . | 43 |
| V. San Juan County ' | 52 |
| VI. Tezah | 68 |
| VII. The Curly O | 74 |
| VIII. The Pateran | 82 |
| IX. Unto the Third Generation . . | 94 |
| X. Target Practice | 108 |
| XI. Jimmy Puts Over a Bluff . . . | 117 |
| XII. The Wireophone. | 133 |
| XIII. Into the Cañon | 148 |
| XIV. The Cliff Dwelling | 161 |
| XV. Behind the Aco | 179 |
| XVI. Tezah Makes a Find | 191 |
| XVII. The Shot in the Cañon . . . | 201 |
| XVIII. The Suspicion of the Sheriff . | 212 |
| XIX. You Sabe? | 227 |
| XX. Capricorn Limited | 235 |

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CHAPTER I

DOUBLE-EAGLES

JIMMY HOLLISTER found himself suddenly wide awake, aroused from the deep sleep of exhaustion by the clarion-call of his subconsciousness. He was unable to determine which one of his senses had sounded the alarm, and lay wide-eyed with all of them alert.

The window was a hazy oblong of gray in the blackness of the walls. Through it the moonlight had streamed when he turned in, stiff from his long day's ride after rebellious cattle. He figured it must be well after midnight. For the moment he could hear nothing but the shrilling of the persistent locusts from the hillsides. Then his nostrils dilated gratefully as they inhaled the aroma of a cigar, diluted by distance, faint but unmistakable.

It was a good cigar. One of the kind Jimmy had smoked up till two weeks ago. It seemed

more like two years at the present moment. He desired its fellow so ardently that he was tempted to go downstairs and ask the envied smoker to give him one, for the love of Sir Walter Raleigh!

It was not Stimpson. He smoked cigarettes with paper tube mouthpieces that looked utterly incongruous amid the tangle of his black beard and matched ill with his bigness and swagger and the gun that swung heavily from his flank. Besides, Jimmy felt certain, as he tried to whip his drowsy brain cells into action, that it was not the cigar that had awakened him.

It was a topsy-turvy world, he reflected, and a fell fortune that had kicked him from a luxurious suite in a Colorado Springs hotel, built especially for the relief of plethoric pocketbooks, to the bed he was now lying on in the attic of a lonely ranch house.

But he was glad of the job, as he had told Stimpson when the latter hired him in front of the employment agency, where he had stood wondering how best a college-bred, soft-handed son of leisure would fit the requirements chalked on the "Help Wanted" board.

That was ten days after he had paid up his bill at the Antlers with the balance of his cash and the money raised on his personal jewellery. A topsy-turvy world! One moment he had been planning

a tour of Colorado with half a dozen casual, convivial acquaintances as his guests; the next, he had opened the letter that held, not the generous draft he had demanded from his New York agent, but the news that the bottom had dropped out of Jerusalem Copper and that he was penniless save for a few scrapings that would take time to gather and would not amount in the main to a week's expenses of his average mode of living.

There was his father, of course; but James Hollister, Sr., had, to Jimmy's mind, handicapped the inheritance of millions with so many hurdles in the course of youth, health, and high spirits that Jimmy had scratched his entry, plunged on a tip in "War Babies," made a pile that seemed unlimited, even to his lavishness, and convinced him that money-making was a much simpler task than his father would have had him think.

Now that he had come a cropper on his own high horse he was not going to ask his father for a fresh mount. It was tough, he told himself, but he set a square chin and shoulders to their best angle of resistance and made the most of it.

He was hungry when Stimpson accosted him. He had told the bluff-mannered giant what he deemed his sole commercial accomplishment from a Colorado standpoint. He could ride. He did not mention the fact that most of his experience

had been gained in the polo field. He had a strong suspicion that Stimpson had him sized up with fair accuracy and he wondered, while he exulted, at securing the job.

"I want a rider," Stimpson had said. "And you're the kind of man I like. I've got a place thirty miles southwest of here, on Antelope Creek, in the foothills. Some cattle. You'll handle them. You can pick up the work. I've got a good cook, and the pay is forty. What do you say?"

"Forty dollars?"

"A month, spot cash. I've got a rig waiting. We start after lunch."

Jimmy's hand fingered the fifteen cents that seemed the only frail bulwark between himself and starvation, and felt that Fortune smiled. He smiled with that fickle jade.

"Do I eat first?" he asked.

"Sure."

It had been a lonely ride through a lonesome country after the first ten miles. Stimpson drove the spirited team silently, his good-nature relapsed into a reticence that left Jimmy feeling very much the hired man. The ranch house was in a pocket of the hills, apparently only linked to civilization by the road and the barbed wire of the line fence.

To Jimmy's astonishment the dingy-looking

house was furnished almost luxuriously. He noted heavy rugs, a player piano, a buffet with glass doors that revealed a miniature bar, and chairs that would have called for cheers from Jimmy's recent fellows at his New York Club.

The cook was a Chinaman, an onyx-eyed, putty-fleshed individual who cooked venison steaks to perfection.

Jimmy had dined in the kitchen with the only other employee, a swarthy deaf-mute, he thought a halfbreed Indian. But he had enjoyed the venison. His own room was not furnished on the downstairs scale. An iron bed with scaling paint, a hard mattress, and a pine chest of drawers that needed a combination of coaxing and main force to open, made up its equipment. But it had been welcome to Jimmy after he had ridden with the deaf-mute to find a scattered bunch of cattle and herd them in a corral.

The Chinaman was as sparing of speech as his master. The latter's bluffness began to assume a bullying manner on his own ground. Jimmy resented it, but he had seen little of his employer, and the forty dollars still loomed large on his impoverished horizon.

Stimpson apparently did nothing. There was a pile of cigarette stubs beside the outside bench where he was sitting when Jimmy came in that

evening, sweating and sore, from the corral. The Chinaman brought out a fresh siphon and filled up the tall glass that Stimpson replenished from a nearly empty bottle of Scotch. There was ice in the highball. Jimmy's mouth puckered now at the remembrance of it.

"Clink!" There it was again. That must have been the sound that had awakened him. It came once more. Now it sounded too heavy for the jubilant sound of ice against glass. Raising himself on one elbow, he listened intently.

It was the clink of metal, the indisputable ring of golden coins, dulled by the flooring, but distinct. Jimmy had handled enough of them in his favourite pastime of seeing how far and fast he could make them spin, to be mistaken. It sounded again, the richly resonant *chuck* of a high stack of double-eagles, in the chosen currency of the states west of the Rocky Mountains, where greenbacks are looked upon with an open suspicion equal to that of the Vermonter offered a twenty-dollar disk of the yellow metal.

He felt as sure of their denomination as he did of that of the three nickels in his overalls. The murmur of voices followed, rising almost to words that he could distinguish, then suddenly hushed. He thought he heard a cautious tread on the

stairs. A board on the landing creaked ever so lightly. Stealing out of bed barefooted to the door, he tried softly to open it. It was locked.

Going to the window, he eased up the lower sash. The weathered walls of the nearest outbuilding showed the dull reflection of light from the room below. Above the peak of its roof the Colorado sky was thickly set with stars. The cool air held the scent of sage blended with the exotic perfume of the cigar. The voices were now subdued to a low murmur.

Jimmy returned to his bed and slipped on his clothes without analyzing the reason for his action save that the mystery of the situation was on his nerves. He figured himself as an insignificant factor in whatever was going on, but he felt better dressed. There was an automatic in his grip, and he tiptoed across the room and got it out.

The cool feel of the metal was reassuring. A gun was a good deal of a toy to Jimmy. He had bought it principally because he had come West. Now he was glad he had not pawned it, mainly on account of his wrath at the Hebrew money lender in offering him two dollars for an unused twenty-dollar weapon.

He went back to the window and hung over the ledge, straining his ears to catch the low-voiced syllables. The light on the outbuilding height-

ened suddenly to the click of a rising blind. Then the window below him opened. A spiral of cigar smoke curled upward.

"Better shut it." It was Stimpson's bass.

"Let's have some fresh air. You could cut this with a knife. You said the kid was asleep."

Jimmy's twenty-six years hotly resented the epithet. The next sentence augmented his choler.

"He's only a Manhattan sucker, stranded on his uppers. But you can't be too careful."

"What did you hire him for?"

"I'm running a ranch, ain't I?"

The words seemed to hold a joke that was appreciated. Then the man retreated from the window without shutting it. An impulse stirred Jimmy to caution. Wriggling back, he closed his sash and crouched beneath it. A bulky shadow projected itself against the reflection on the barn. Someone—it looked like Stimpson's shadow to Jimmy—had come silently out of the house and was looking up at his window.

He waited several minutes before he peered out. The yard was clear, and he slid up the sash once more and resumed his position. The men were poking fun at the Chinaman.

"Bring some more ice, Ah Fung. This wouldn't keep a toad cool."

"Plenty ice now. Mebbe bimeby some place you go you no find so much."

There was more laughter at the sally, followed by the noises of bottle neck and glass rim.

"Are you sure the stuff is going to be here tomorrow, Stimpy? We don't want to hang 'round the Springs too long. What we've got ain't hardly enough to pay for the trip."

"I told you the girl was a day late. There's the telegram."

"Pretty risky, a girl packing it, isn't it?"

"What do you want to do? Ship it by Wells Fargo and have some baggage smasher bust a box and give the whole thing away."

"You're a fox, Stimpy. Is the girl wise?"

"She's no fool. But that's my end of it."

His deep voice held a note of bluster.

"Is she pretty, that's what I want to know. Hanged if I don't think I'll stay here to-night, Stimpy, and get a look at her."

The speaker had evidently been drinking. Stimpson answered him with a growling volley of oaths.

"You attend to your end of it, damn you, and I'll look after mine. The less people seen 'round here in daytime the better."

"Stimpy's right," said another. "Don't be an ass, Slim."

There was a swift confusion of a struggle. A bottle smashed against the window-frame. Jimmy could hear the fragments of it tinkling on the ground beneath him. A shot followed and the sound of a falling chair. Then the shuffling of feet, and silence.

"You've plugged him, Stimpy."

"Serves him right."

"That queers it. We can't pack around a man shot through the shoulder."

"Then you'll have to patch him up and get him away somewhere. I'll not have him here. He can stand the trip to Denver. You'll have to come back in a week. Call the Chink, someone, and we'll bandage him up. The bullet's gone clean through. Shut that window. We'll take him in the kitchen. He's ruined that chair already."

The window was slammed down. Feet shuffled once more and the sound died away.

"I like Stimpson—not," said Jimmy to himself. "A cheerful crowd, the lot of them. I wonder what the stuff is the girl is bringing? They seemed to have plenty of money to pay for it. I think I'll stick close around the house to-morrow. What's the next act, I wonder?"

He had not long to wait. The purr of a motor-car broke the quiet. The glare of powerful headlights flared out and caught the corner of the barn

in an iridescent arc that swept into the road as the car turned.

"Eight cylinders," decided Jimmy in the light of other days. "Some little car. There she goes. I wonder how long before Stimpny lets me out of here. I'll have to play the innocent in the morning. I won't sleep to-night, that's certain. It's getting light already."

As he turned from the window before closing it he could faintly make out the outlines of his scanty furnishings. A hillside echo mocked the whirr of the fast-speeding car. He caught the distant rattle of dishes from the kitchen. The deaf-mute crossed the yard and let down the bars to a lane up which two cows were slowly coming to be milked.

Jimmy grinned.

"Looks peaceful enough now," he muttered. "I'll get out of these clothes again in case Stimpny takes a notion to give me a personal call."

As he slipped between the rough blankets he heard the sound of a heavy tread on the stairs.

CHAPTER II

DEBORAH DANE

SLEEP well?"

Forewarned, Jimmy's yawn was perfectly natural. He felt Stimpson's dark eyes keenly scrutinizing him as he answered:

"Like a log. Time to get up?"

"Sun's due in fifteen minutes. We get up early here. Si shot a coyote a little while ago."

"Si?"

Still conscious of the intent gaze of his employer, Jimmy covered any possible fault in his acting by starting to dress.

"Who's Si?"

Stimpson laughed. The tension of suspicion seemed to have passed.

"He's my other man that's working with you. 'Si' is short for Silent. He ain't managed to tell us his other name, seeing he's deaf, dumb, and forgot to go to school. I've got a light job for you to-day. There's a break in the fence somewhere. I want you to start right after breakfast, ride the wire and locate it. Get Ah Fung to put you up a

snack, it may take you time to find it, and it's got to be fixed."

In the face of last night's experience Jimmy knew that Stimpson lied, that the fence was intact and the job manufactured to keep him clear of the ranch house. His employer was once more watching him narrowly, and he replied promptly:

"That sounds like a snap. I'll find it before I show up. This work suits me, and I'm going to make good."

"That's the talk. Slide along and get your grub."

Jimmy obeyed, satisfied that Stimpson had appraised him as he had wished him to, an out-of-luck drifter, anxious to make willingness balance his lack of brains.

"I'll find a break in that fence," he told himself, "if I have to make it myself. That'll give me an excuse to come back. I can forget my tools."

Ah Fung's eyes, like the agates of Jimmy's marble-playing childhood, regarded him inscrutably during the meal. He paused in apparently friendly fashion after loading Jimmy's plate with hot cakes and spoke:

"You *sabe* kyoty? Him shoot one las' night."

Jimmy, looking at the stolid half-breed with proper interest, asked:

"Did he kill it?"

A wraith of humour flickered in the Oriental's orbs and faded.

"No, he no kill. Kyoty, I think, he long time plenty lame."

"So Ah Fung is in on the game," thought Jimmy. "If I stick around here long enough I'll get wise to a few things myself. There's something out of the ordinary in the wind."

Still thinking it over, he cantered away on his pony. The mount was a good one, and as he danced away on springy fetlocks over the soft, powdery soil that lay between the clumps of sage. Jimmy, drinking in the rare, exhilarating air, felt very well satisfied with life.

A little chagrin manifested itself as he realized that Stimpson's choice of him had been prompted by his tenderfoot appearance. His employment was evidently a blind to aid a general conviction that Stimpson was a rancher, pure and simple.

"A lot he cares about cattle," thought Jimmy. "They didn't bring him in the money I heard clinking last night. I wonder just how much of a fool he thinks I am? I must look like one. I suppose he couldn't find another deaf-mute, so he hired a greenhorn.

"I'd like to know what that crowd with the eight-cylinder car and the fifty-cent cigars were do-

ing here. It wouldn't be just gambling. There's something crooked going on, and I'd like to find out what it is. I may be able to stir up a little excitement, after all."

Following the fence until a rise hid him from the sight of any one who might be watching from the ranch, he let his pony graze and mounted the ridge, making himself comfortable in a notch of rim-rock, and settled down to watch the road that looped like a white ribbon among the gray hills. The straight stretch of half a mile that led to the ranch gate was plainly visible.

Locusts whirled and lizards flickered about the rocks as he watched. He saw the deaf-mute ride off in the opposite direction on what Jimmy told himself was another fool's errand. Ah Fung came out, threw some scraps to the chickens, then went into the house.

Presently Stimpson wandered out to the gate and stood there looking down the road. In the clear air Jimmy could see the white patch of the cigarette in his black beard and fancied he could distinguish the blue curl of its smoke.

"Getting anxious," he muttered. "The girl must be due."

He wondered idly if she was pretty. Jimmy was not over keen on girls. As a general rule, he rather regarded them as nuisances. But when he liked

them, he liked them pretty, and he liked them to qualify as out-of-doors women.

"I wouldn't trust Stimpny very far with a woman," he decided. "He was mighty anxious not to have the rest stick around. I wonder——"

He broke his thought abruptly. A cloud of dust was rising at the first curve of the road. It resolved itself into a light buckboard drawn by two horses. A slender figure in gray held the reins. Two big trunks filled the space between the seats.

"Looks like a kid," said Jimmy to himself. "Drives well, though, hands down and shoulders back like a good one. Regular park style. I must find that break in the fence."

Chuckling, he pried out several staples' length with the handle of his pliers and trampled down the wire. Then he tossed the tool over his shoulder.

"There, I've lost the confounded thing," he said, aloud. "Maybe I left it at the ranch?"

He remounted and made a swift circuit of the crest of the hill, so that he would appear to have ridden back by a short cut. He rode on down a dry arroyo that led into the little stream that watered the ranch buildings. It was fringed with willows and edged with turf, on which his pony's hoofs were noiseless.

Passing the side of a barn, he heard the sound of voices talking in the narrow way between two of

the buildings. The light road wagon with the two trunks stood in the scanty shadow, the team hitched to a cottonwood.

The girl was speaking. A note of apprehension in her voice made Jimmy rein in and listen without compunction while he soothed his fretful mount with one hand on its neck. The voice held a quality both girlish and refined, and it had a certain ring to it that struck an answering note somewhere inside of Jimmy's ego. Here was a girl of his own breed. Moreover, his instinct told him that she was a nice one.

"I don't know what you mean," she said. "Please give me the receipt, Mr. Stimpson, and let me go."

"Now, see here, young lady. I'm getting sick of this innocence pose of yours." Stimpson's growling bass was impatient.

"You can pretend you don't know anything about your father's business if it makes you feel any better. It's the wise thing to do, but cut it out with me. I wrote your father to tell you what I wanted. He allowed he could handle you better than I could. Now, then, what's the answer?"

"My father told me nothing except to get your receipt. I am waiting for it."

"Oh, he didn't, eh? Well, if he's afraid of you, I'm not. And he ain't going to go back on his

word without getting into trouble. He ought to know which side his bread is buttered on, and yours comes off the same loaf.

"Now, then, we're tied pretty close as it is, and I'm proposing to make the knot firmer for our mutual benefit. I haven't hurried the matter because I wasn't ready. Now I am. It's been understood between me and your dad, and he should have told you. I'm looking to get married and I've picked you. He's promised you to me."

"My father promised I would marry you?"

Jimmy almost chuckled aloud at the scornful wonder of the question. He slid softly to the ground and dropped the reins to trail.

"He did. I want the matter settled. How long do you want to get ready?"

"You are making yourself ridiculous, Mr. Stimpson. Please give me my receipt and stand aside."

Stimpson's answer came in an explosion of wrath.

"Ridiculous, am I? Well, it's not you who'll make a fool of Jabez Stimpson. I'm as good as you are any day."

He seemed to calm himself with an effort as Jimmy's fists balled themselves for action.

"There's no occasion for high and mightiness, young lady. I'm not a fancy wooer, though I've

taken a fancy to you all right. I can make love fast enough when it comes down to it."

Jimmy took a light step forward.

"And you'll find me the best match you can make for all your frills and fine ways."

"Give me the receipt." The words were icy.

Stimpson suddenly laughed. At the sound of it Jimmy precipitated himself into action.

"I'll give you the receipt," said the ranch owner. "Ten packages there was. Now, then——"

Swinging in the passageway, Jimmy heard the sharp *swack* of the girl's hand on Stimpson's cheek. He had caught her up in his arms and, despite her struggles, was gradually forcing her face upward to meet his own, one great hand cupping the back of her head where a coil of hair, brilliantly red in the sunshine, streamed between his fingers to her waist.

Jimmy took a leap, skip, and jump that landed him fairly beside them. He struck heavily at the elbow crook of Stimpson's left arm which encircled the girl's waist and hooked the fingers of his right hand into the collar of the ranch owner's shirt, tearing him loose with the sheer impetus of his rush as the girl whirled herself free.

He was barely conscious of her, one hand to her disordered hair, the other fumbling with the belt of her dress, when Stimpson, stumbling back

against the barn wall, recovered his balance and, roaring like a bull, started to draw the gun that swung at his right hip.

Jimmy remembered that gun, though he had forgotten his own in the lack of accustomed use. He grabbed at Stimpson's wrist with his left hand and warded off with his right the smashing blow that was aimed at his head.

The alleyway was no place for a fight. In it Stimpson's heavier bulk and bull strength held all the advantage. Jimmy felt his hold slipping on the massive wrist and quickly shifted, pinioning his man about the elbows, grappling with him fiercely, and trying to trip him for a fall. Stimpson grunted at the swift fury of the rush, but his legs seemed solidly planted on the ground and all the drive and fury of Jimmy's attack failed to do more than hold him to a clinch.

They swayed back and forth between the buildings, straining for a master grip, panting hard, the sweat already starting under the hot noon sun. Jimmy felt the great muscles bulging in Stimpson's brawny arms and his own clutch slowly being forced apart. He almost groaned as he realized that in a moment there would be a flash, a report, and the end of the fight.

He remembered his own automatic now. It was in his hip pocket and the safety catch was up.

Before he could get it out Stimpson's superior use of a weapon would have settled matters. His interlocked fingers at Stimpson's back were beginning to slip. In another second . . .

From the corner of his eye he saw the girl dart in toward them and back again, a brief vision of flashing blue eyes in a pale, determined face.

Stimpson swore as she called out:

"I've got his gun."

Jimmy acted promptly. He was no match for Stimpson at close quarters and he was not in the pink of condition, but at that, he was better off than Stimpson. There was one soft spot in the latter's anatomy, a stomach born of over indulgence and lack of exercise. Jimmy leaped suddenly backward and in again between Stimpson's clutching arms, driving in a straight-armed punch with all his force that sent his man staggering while the tan of his cheek above the dark line of his beard flushed to an angry red.

Stimpson came back, flailing sledge-hammer blows that threatened to beat down Jimmy's defence. He broke ground, leading Stimpson on to where the alley led into a corral whose bars were down. Jimmy leaped over the obstacle backward but Stimpson, blundering on, caught his foot against one of the poles and went floundering forward with outstretched arms, trying not to fall.

Jimmy side-stepped and planted a hard jolt to the jaw as his opponent passed him. He put all his force behind it and felt the jar of the bone behind the thick hair, but Stimpson did not drop. Instead, he wheeled, straightening up, his face convulsed, blood dripping to the mat of his beard from a lip cut through by his teeth under the impact of the blow.

Jimmy danced away. He had plenty of room now, and as long as he could keep clear he felt sure of the issue. Stimpson's stomach laboured heavily as he breathed through his open mouth, grunting oaths that were barely articulated.

The girl had climbed the fence of the corral and was seated on the top bar. Beyond, in the next inclosure, the curious heads of cattle made a strange audience. The gun was poised in her hand.

"Don't shoot," cried Jimmy. "I've got him."

He had found his second wind and he was beginning to enjoy himself. He knew how to handle his fists, and there was a special zest to this fight in front of an insulted woman and the lowing herd. He got home to his mark for the first time at the expense of a punch that caught him high above the heart but failed to check his drive to the wind, fairly at the junction of shirt and trousers.

Stimpson's bellow was checked for lack of breath

and Jimmy, feinting for the jaw, landed a second jolt in the pit of the stomach.

As he followed up his advantage he heard a cry of warning from the girl, but Stimpson had gripped him, and he was exerting all his strength to break away, and failed to catch its purport.

The next second the ranch owner tripped against the base of a watering trough and fell heavily, striking his side against the U-shaped iron receptacle.

Jimmy plumped down upon his chest. His shirt was torn to tatters, he was drenched with sweat, and his heart was pounding, but he was triumphant. Stimpson lay still, his face gray with pain. Jimmy got free his automatic and, rising, sat panting on the edge of the trough, his weapon covering the prostrate man.

He half turned toward the girl, a wary eye on Stimpson.

"Shall I let him up?" he asked.

"Wait a minute," she said.

Stimpson moved painfully and took Jimmy's attention. Then he saw Ah Fung with his hands high above his queue-braided head, walking sulkily to the fence, the girl behind him, Stimpson's gun in one hand and in the other a long knife that Jimmy placed as one of the Chinaman's culinary tools.

"He tried to run in on you," said the girl.
"Climb over there with the steers, Ah Fung."

"Me no like. Me too much flaid."

"Climb over! And stay there till I tell you to come out."

Jimmy laughed at the ludicrous picture of the scared Oriental clambering reluctantly over the high fence, menaced alternately by the pistol and the horns of the uneasy cattle. But the girl's face was serious and he protestingly descended on the other side. The steers opened and then closed in a circle about him, sniffing with lowered heads. The girl turned to Jimmy.

"Thank you," she said.

"Don't mention it," he said, gravely.

For the few moments in which he had been able to regard her, disappointment had come to him. She was not pretty, he told himself. She had gorgeous hair and a slender, rounded figure that was graceful in almost a boyish way. Her skin from throat to hair-line was an even, pale golden tan. Her mouth was a little large and her nose nondescript. She had fine eyes, dark blue and frank. Altogether she would not have been chosen as a film beauty.

Then she laughed at her perfunctory gratitude and his conventional reply, and Jimmy changed his mind.

Her eyes danced, white, small teeth flashed between scarlet lips, and her whole face seemed illumined like a transparent shade behind which a lamp has been suddenly lighted. On their mutual laughter a bridge of fellowship and understanding seemed suddenly to have been established.

"What'll I do with him?" asked Jimmy.

"You'll have to let him up, I suppose."

"Get up," said Jimmy.

Stimpson helped himself to a stand with a twist of pain.

"You've broken my ribs, blast you!" he said.

"I'll get even with both of you for this."

"Easy with your language," said Jimmy, evenly.

"I think you said you needed a receipt, Miss——?"

She ignored the opportunity to supply her name.

"I do," she said. "That's what I am waiting for."

"Then sign it," said Jimmy.

Stimpson glared at him furiously.

"I can't use this arm," he said.

"Then make your mark. We'll go into the house. Then you can come back and let Ah Fung out. He's too scared to move."

Once in the sitting room, Jimmy searched and found pen and ink. Stimpson, still under the coercion of the automatic, sat glowering at the table. The girl stood at the open door, in case

Ah Fung should gather courage to return or someone else interfere.

"Where's the receipt?" asked Jimmy.

She took it from an inner pocket of her trim Norfolk jacket. Without looking at it Jimmy set it in front of Stimpson.

"Sign it," he said.

With evident pain Stimpson managed to scrawl a signature, and Jimmy handed it back to the girl.

"There you are, Miss——?"

Again she appeared not to notice the query of his rising inflection.

"I saw your wagon back of the barn. Is it all ready?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes, thank you. I was only waiting for the receipt."

She set Stimpson's weapon down on the table by Jimmy's hand and disappeared. He looked after her ruefully as he presently heard the quick crunch of wheels on gravel, the spatter of horses' hoofs, and the rattle of the rig's swift departure.

Stimpson forced a short laugh.

"That's what you get for your pains, you young fool. Now you can walk to town. Do you hear me?" he shouted. "You're fired."

"Naturally," said Jimmy. "Case of *ipso facto*. I'm off as soon as I get my stuff and say a few things that are on my mind.

"You said something just now about getting even. As far as I'm concerned you are welcome to try. It's probably brag. I overheard a few things last night and to-day and, if you try to persecute that girl in any way, I'll make things lively for you. You shot a man in this room last night. It's possible you don't want the matter inquired into. That's one check for you. Outside of that, I'll make it my business to give you another licking."

"You crow loud for a young cock," said Stimpson. "Why, you fool, you don't even know her name. She wouldn't tell you when you tried to make her."

"Don't I?" said Jimmy, with a grin. "How's this? Deborah Dane, Curly O Rancho, Aztec, San Juan County, New Mexico."

Stimpson's glare became murderous, his face apoplectic.

"Now," said Jimmy, "I'm going to treat you to your own medicine. You're going upstairs with me while I pack. Then I'll lock you up in my room the same way you did me."

Fifteen minutes later, listening gleefully to Stimpson in the bedroom shouting fruitlessly to Ah Fung in the cattle corral, Jimmy was tramping down the road that stretched for thirty dusty, thirsty, hungry miles to Colorado Springs. The

fifteen cents, too insignificant to jingle, still represented his sole working capital.

He had not wasted his time asking Stimpson for the fractional salary due him. He was stiff and sore from riding and the fight; and, unless some friendly wagon appeared, he was likely to be stiffer before he reached the Springs. But he was happy. The only fly in his ointment was the way the girl had treated him at the last.

At the bend of the road he shifted the grip that held all his worldly possessions into his left hand and cast a farewell look at the ranch. He could still hear Stimpson's muffled bellowing. A moving speck on a distant ridge he felt sure was Si, returning from his errand. Not all the ranch owner's shouts would hurry Si an iota.

Jimmy chuckled.

"I wish I had his horse," he said aloud to an inquisitive blue jay that had lit on the fence beside him. "She might have given me a lift. She was pretty, after all, but, for sheer ingratitude, she wins hands down."

He started down the long slope, whistling, in full recognition of its appropriateness:

It's a long, long way to Tipperary,
It's a long way to go——

CHAPTER III

A SHEARED LAMB AND SOME GOATS

IT WAS a week later. Jimmy, clothed in the garments of conventionality, and with a contented mind, stood by the desk of the Brown Palace Hotel, Denver, waiting for the clerk to give him the key to his room and bath.

After an undignified and, to admit the truth, somewhat crestfallen arrival at Colorado Springs, Jimmy had squeezed the Hebrew pawnbroker up to two dollars and a half for his automatic pistol. He had split this sum two ways. One half went for a night letter to his New York agent to wait not upon the order of his gathering up what was left by the shearers of Wall Street of the once magnificent fleece that Jimmy, in his rôle of lamb, had sported so proudly.

The other had been expended so lavishly at a cheap restaurant that its owner took the brief flash in the pan seriously and sat down by Jimmy at the end of his meal with a suggestion that he needed a partner, with cash, for the proper development of the place. Jimmy's laugh and frank avowal

of his financial stress did not seem to dampen the other's appreciation.

"I'm doing the cooking," he said. "I need someone square to handle the cash. If you want to set up behind the register for a day or so till you get the answer you're expecting, why, you're welcome to your meals and a bunk in the back room."

"But why?" Jimmy had asked. "Why pick me?"

"Like your style. You've got a good eye and a good jaw. You'll be ridin' high before you get through."

All this was manna in the wilderness, and the restaurant keeper's confidence stiffened Jimmy's backbone materially. For four days he rang up receipts and made change and, on the fifth, there came a telegram from New York which read:

Three thousand wired your account First National Colorado Springs. Could have been more if willing to wait. Best possible under circumstances. Good luck.
RITCHIE.

Jimmy had collected and bidden farewell to his friend of the restaurant, resisting a final offer to come in on the ground floor and, with his belongings freed from the thralldom of pawn, he had gone to Denver to find something that, with a limited

capital, plus health, youth, and ambition, minus practical knowledge, might offer a fair chance of profitable investment. Aside from the excitement, his few hours at the Stimpson ranch had given him a fancy for some similar, out-of-doors employment, not as a hired hand but as his own master, to whom inexperience would be a negligible debit.

Jimmy still liked to select his dishes from a good *menu* without regard to price marks, and his taste in cigars was expensive. But he bought a pipe and five pounds of good tobacco and resolved to set a great gap between himself and the fleshpots of Colorado's capital as soon as possible. He had begun to learn the true value of money. His ideas of investment were vague and ranged from ore to orchards, from cattle to canteloupes.

As he stood, he was a shining mark for the Colorado sharpshooters mustered under the banner of "Real Estate and Investment." So far he had not wandered near enough for them to choose their weapons and estimate the range and no one, seeing him in the rotunda, dressed in the clothes that had given a Fifth Avenue sartorial artist much care and final satisfaction, would have imagined Jimmy to be anything but what he had been the last time he registered at the Palace, a care-free, money-careless, roving son of a millionaire father.

Jimmy knew the difference. The keen remembrance of the three nickels acted as a constant reminder that there was not the mammoth gap between them and three thousand dollars that the hasty mathematics of youth usually accounted.

"I wonder if I'm getting tight," he had asked himself that noon as he tipped the waiter a sum that would have meant comparative affluence to Jimmy ten days ago. "Perhaps I'm just cutting my wisdom teeth. I've got to quit putting out and begin to take in, that's certain."

The clerk having condescended to recognize him, Jimmy's hand was outstretched for the key when he saw a girl stepping into one of the elevators. For a second his heart seemed to turn a somersault, to Jimmy's own surprise.

That the sight of Deborah Dane interested him he was prepared to admit, but the sudden flutter of an organ that had hitherto behaved itself with exemplary regularity startled him out of his self-possession. The bronze gate slid to at the wave of the starter, and a fleeting glimpse of red hair beneath a *tricorné* hat assured him that he was not mistaken. He turned to the clerk, who was still holding the key.

"Miss Dane staying here?" he asked.

The clerk languidly turned to his record. He

did not know of Jimmy's harlequin finances and he had him rated high as a lavish guest. He answered accordingly.

"Miss Deborah Dane, Aztec, New Mexico," he announced. "K 14. Stays here regularly, every two or three months. Going home tomorrow."

Jimmy felt instinctively for a cigar, but reserved the reward at the remembrance of his abstinence. She was here and going home tomorrow! He put his key in his pocket and sat down in the corner of an empty lounge to settle his emotions.

She had left him to walk thirty miles, but there might be an excuse for that. She had a smile that made her face look like the sunrise on Pike's Peak, and she was a thoroughbred—he was sure of that. He remembered the way she had handled Ah Fung. Then there was the mystery of her association with Stimpson and the "stuff" she had brought to the ranch, presumably in the trunks, on one of which he had read her name and so surprised Stimpson with the information.

His mental debate came to its inevitable conclusion. He wanted to see her again, at least to get one smile out of her. Further than that he did not stir up the feelings of interest that he dimly resented. He could not yet see Jimmy Hollister in

the light of a dangler after any particular girl, no matter how well she smiled.

Inevitably she must descend, he decided. The lounge commanded the elevators. He had just lunched. The girl, sooner or later, would dine. Perhaps?—he caught himself ordering the kind of dinner he thought she would enjoy (in his company) and frowned at this lingering evidence of inherent extravagance.

Besides, unconventional as their meeting had been, she was known at the hotel, she was dressed in what Jimmy vaguely recognized as taste combined with fashion. Denver was not Stimpson's ranch. If he was to treat her with respect in Rome, and he wished to, he must do as the Romans do and secure a matron for chaperon. An introduction, fortunately, he did not need.

He failed to realize that this complete occupation of his thoughts by the fair was a dangerous symptom. Instead he once more reached for a cigar to aid reflection, recollected his self-imposed tabu, and got out his pipe and filled it.

“Good tobacco you're smoking, pardner.”

Jimmy turned to see a lanky individual with a bronzed face, high cheekbones, and humorous, friendly eyes under shaggy, grizzly brows. The top of his sloping dome was hairless, the hirsute

energy seeming to have broken out in a shaggy mare's-tail of a beard. His upper lip was clean-shaven. His clothes were evidently his go-to-city suit, and beneath his trousers projected the lowers of high leather boots.

The Brown Palace rotunda was, by long custom, the meeting-place for all sorts and conditions of Colorado flotsam and jetsam. Jimmy was no fool. He knew that the gold brick had been modernized into many new shapes and that he might appear easy. But he warmed instinctively to the stranger, who seemed almost wistfully lonesome.

"I think it's good," he said, cordially. "Try some?" And he passed his pouch.

The man—Jimmy was irresistibly reminded of the Bock beer placards on a closer inspection—took the bag and dipped into it, filling an old briar to the brim and scratching a match on his bootleg.

"That's some better than I've been puffin' on," he said. "I use Star Plug mostly. It's better chewin' than smokin', but it's putty fair. Nothin' like this, though. I'm goin' to take some back to the ranch if I ain't askin' too much in the name of the brand."

Jimmy told him, one eye on the elevator.

"Cattle?" he asked, casually.

"No, siree. Steers is played out. No range

left 'cept for sheep, and I hate 'em on general principles. Kind of compromised at that, but I've struck the combination. Goats."

Jimmy idly wondered whether the companionship of his herd had resulted in a fellow likeness, but he politely evinced interest.

"What do you feed 'em? Tin cans?"

"Haw—haw! That's a good one. But I'll tell you something. They don't eat cans. It's the labels. And they like the bright-coloured ones. I've tried 'em out on tomatter tins. No, siree. I told ye I'd got the combination. I took up some left-over Government land, foothills as thick with scrub as a new hairbrush, down in Archuleta County. Good soil underneath, and it's goin' to be better.

"I fix up a chunk at a time with hog-fencing and turn in the Angoras. They eat off the brush and fertilize the land. Bye and bye it'll be first-rate orchard land. Then I'll sell and move on. I'm sticking to the goats."

"Wool valuable?"

"Yep. Good money in the fleeces, and the kids are worth two and a half apiece on the hoof. When you order a young saddle in any first-class chop restaurant in Denver you may think you're eatin' lamb, but you ain't. It's goat, and liable to be from Jimmy Amber's place, Archuleta County.

Tenderer the meat the surer it's kid. Yes, siree."

With another glance at the elevators Jimmy gave closer attention. He was becoming really interested.

"My name's Jimmy, too," he said. "Jimmy Hollister. Your goats sound good to me. Does it take much capital to start?"

The goatman gave him a keen glance.

"Mean it?" he asked.

Jimmy nodded. His face reassured the other.

"I should have thought," he said, "that kid gloves was more in your line than fleeces and lamb chops. But I don't know. If you're in earnest I can save you money. It takes the right kind of climate. But it don't need much to get a herd. And the land is free. I started on twelve hundred dollars. I'm worth nigh to fifty times that now, though I reckon I don't look it," he added, modestly.

Jimmy had an inspiration.

"Know anything about San Juan County, New Mexico?" he asked.

"Yes, siree. La Plata County's next to Archuleta, west. San Juan's right under La Plata across the line. And there's Government land there joining to the Navajo Reservation just right for goats. Most folks don't like Indians for

neighbours, but the Navajos are good *hombres*. I always got along fine with what I met. Tell you what I'll do——"

"Excuse me a minute."

Jimmy had caught sight of the girl leaving the elevator and making for the desk. He sprang up and waited, hat in hand, until she had given up her key. Then he faced her with his nicest bow.

She looked at him with eyes cold with lack of recognition, her eyebrows rising. Then she tilted her chin ever so slightly and walked by him to the door.

"Stung!" mentally ejaculated Jimmy.

The clerk was turning to hide a grin.

"That loses you a good cigar," decided Jimmy, retiring in chagrin to the lounge.

"Gel didn't recognize ye?" said the goatman.

His voice held just the proper poise of non-inquisitive consolation or Jimmy, in rising wrath, would have turned on him. Then his anger abated as suddenly as it had mounted.

"I was an ass," he said. "Last time she saw me I was in overalls—and half a shirt."

"Some disguise. Thet's 'Shepherd' Dane's gel."

"Shepherd? Has he got a sheep ranch?"

"He had," chuckled the goatman. "Right here in Denver. But they ran him off. I don't know anything against the gel, but the Shepherd is a bad 'un. Yes, siree. They gave him his name

because he used to herd the long wools into a little poker game he ran over on Champa Street. Looks like a benevolent old parson. But he's a scalawag from way back. Poker and a cold deck wasn't his only accomplishments.

"He's been a mine faker and claim salter, mixed up in land swindles; any kind of easy-money scheme he could cover up under his gray whiskers. Looks like Joaquin Miller turned saint. Only Joaquin's passed over the range and the Shepherd is still on deck, I reckon, tending sheep, though I ain't seen him lately. They have a reform wave in Denver once in a while, and the last one washed him away. No offence to you, Mister Hollister, or to the gel. She looks like a throw-back.

"Suppose you and I have a drink," he went on in kindly fashion that Jimmy appreciated as a screen for his embarrassment. "Then we can talk a spell about goats. If you go down San Juan way you'll be almost a neighbour, and I'd like to see you get started right."

Jimmy went with him, trying to adjust his point of view to a perspective that would show the girl clear and clean of her paternal shortcomings. It wasn't very difficult to do so with himself as special pleader, court and jury, and, as he finished his highball and set down the glass upon the polished bar, he uttered his verdict aloud:

"I don't believe it."

"I don't blame ye," answered the goatman.

"It don't seem possible for an ornery critter like a goat to be a God-sent philanthropist, but it's true, every word of it. Land clearance, fertilizer, fleece, and flesh, they're the best animal Noah let out of the ark."

CHAPTER IV

THE ELEVEN-THIRTY TRAIN

JIMMY went to bed primed with statistics on goat culture and keen to try his hand at what seemed to offer a solution of his problem of making good on his own account. That his enthusiasm was indissolubly linked with Deborah Dane he did not attempt to deny to himself.

His first waking thought was the remembrance of the fact that this was the day she left for San Juan County. The goatman's crisp estimate of her father had not lowered her in Jimmy's estimation. His sense of chivalry, largely latent until his encounter with Stimpson had shaken it into activity, was developing rapidly.

"No girl," he reasoned as he fussed over the set of his necktie, "could smile like that and be anything but straight. I wonder if she'll smile when I tell her I'm going to settle in San Juan County."

By the time he had dressed he was in friendly mood with all the world. The clerk was forgiven and propitiated with cigars, in return for which he

vouchsafed the information that Miss Dane was leaving on the Denver & Rio Grande at eleven-thirty, that the porter was to go for her trunks at ten o'clock, and that breakfast had been ordered served in her room at nine.

It was then a few minutes after eight. Jimmy hurried into the dining room and read, between bites, the one letter that awaited him, forwarded from Colorado Springs according to the instructions he had left. It was from his father, brief and to the point:

MY DEAR SON:

I understand that when Jerusalem Copper tumbled, your fortunes fell with it. The only real money is money based on sound financial economics. Perhaps from your new position you may dimly perceive the truth of this. If you do and care to return upon the terms already thrashed out between us, I shall be glad to show you how to handle your prospects.

I have every confidence in your ultimate success. I merely wish to save you the hard knocks that my experience coupled with your obedience may successfully divert. A line from you will bring you whatever temporary assistance you may stand in need of. In the meantime I am, as always,

Your affectionate father,

JAMES J. HOLLISTER.

"Good old dad," said Jimmy to himself. "I wish he understood better. Polo ponies, auto-

mobiles, and aeroplanes have put the younger generation's education on a different footing. Not that I am liable to have anything to do with any of those for a while. But he bred me out-of-doors, and an office to me looks like a duck pond to a brook trout."

He thrust the letter away for later answering, and, signing his check, fussed for fifteen minutes with the hotel florist before he decided upon a dozen long-stemmed American Beauties. The price staggered even his New York ideas, but he paid it cheerfully. On a visiting-card he added a message beneath his name:

Ex-rider for Jabez Stimpson. I should like to see you before you go south.
J. H.

He addressed the label, sent it to her room, and haunted the rotunda. The clock behind the desk seemed alternately to dawdle and rush until its hands pointed to eleven o'clock. No boy earned the dollar that waited for the paging of Jimmy Hollister. At ten minutes past the hour he tackled the clerk again.

"Miss Dane? She's checked out. Her bill was sent up half an hour ago."

"I didn't see her go."

"Went by the Broadway entrance. Taxi-cabs leave from there."

Jimmy called himself names for the idiocy that had forgotten the hotel was built on a gore.

"Get me a cab on the jump," he said.

In two minutes his chauffeur was risking arrest on his way down Sixteenth Street to the Union Depot.

"I'll pay the fine if you're pinched," said Jimmy. "If not, there's twenty for you to slip into high and stay there."

It looked as if the girl was purposely eluding him, but Jimmy's jaw was not square for the sole purpose of ornament. If she would have none of him the goats could go glimmering, he told himself, but he was going to find out where he stood at first hand.

There was a blockade at Wazee Street. A freight train, in defiance of civic regulations, had come to a standstill across Sixteenth Street. Jimmy chafed as he looked out of his window at the long line of arrested traffic. Then the prospect brightened. Deborah's cab—he called her Deborah to himself already—might be among them. He gave a five-dollar piece to the chauffeur.

"Follow down to the depot," he called as he sped down the array of vehicles.

Close to the freight train, which the efforts of an indignant traffic policeman had at last split in two, he caught a glint of red hair beneath a *tri-*

corne hat through the window of a taxi. Before he could reach the door the cab sped through the opening.

Jimmy sprinted, reaching the entrance to the Union Depot as the tower clock marked twenty-five minutes after the hour, and the girl stepped out of the taxi. A red-cap rushed for her grip as she paid the chauffeur and turned to confront Jimmy with a bouquet of American Beauties in her hand.

"Come on," he said. "We've got to hurry. D. & R. G. southbound, eleven-thirty," he threw at the porter.

"Yassah. Track 6!"

The girl seemed swept off her feet by Jimmy's impetuosity as she hastened along by his side. She gave him a glance of mingled amusement, wonder, and approval. Or so Jimmy interpreted it.

"You are persistent," she said. "I have to thank you for these."

"You are elusive," he said. "I've had a hard time catching up to you ever since you drove off in the wagon."

"I've thought about that," she said. "I suppose Stimpson discharged you. I didn't realize it then. I was in a hurry to get my train. Your card said you were riding for him."

Her glance swept curiously over his immaculate attire.

"I quit riding for walking soon after you left," said Jimmy with a grin. "That's all right. Tell you about that later. No time now."

They had reached the gate. The girl produced her ticket.

"Seeing the lady off," said Jimmy.

The gateman appraised him and touched his hat.

"Right next to the observashun, suh," said the red-cap. "Lady want a seat in the observashun?"

"Right you are, 'Rastus."

With two minutes yet to go he established her on the platform. She looked at him whimsically. Then she smiled

"Ah!" said Jimmy, ecstatically.

Her smile grew more radiant and vanished as the conductor passed them, watch in hand.

"We're starting," she said. "I owe you an apology. Believe me, I didn't mean to be rude. Did you want to say anything to me?" she added, half doubtfully.

"Lots," said Jimmy. The train began to move and he threw one leg over the platform. "I'll tell you later"

"Later?"

"Yes. I'm coming down to Aztec in a few days. Going to settle there. I'll look you up."

Apprehension clouded her eyes. She set a gloved hand on Jimmy's arm.

"No," she said. "You mustn't do that. I mean, don't try to see me. It's impossible."

A trainman yelled at Jimmy, poised on the outside of the railing.

"That's my middle name," he said. "Good-bye. See you later."

He dropped off lightly, waving his hand. She shook her head vigorously at him. Her gaze seemed to hold a positive terror. She cupped her hands and called to him:

"Don't—come—to—Aztec!"

Jimmy shouted back.

"Next week."

He watched the train pass out of the sheds with her warning still ringing in his ears.

"Wild horses wouldn't keep me from Aztec now," he told himself, with his jaw squarer than ever. "She was glad to see me. If she wasn't she ought not to have smiled. And she had my roses, which was mighty decent of her, considering how well they didn't go with her red hair. Fine choice I made."

He appeased the angry gateman with the usual panacea and passed thoughtfully out to where his

taxicab awaited him, pondering the earnestness of her last request. A man was swearing at the chauffeur of another cab. Jimmy looked at him casually. It was Stimpson.

The ranch owner's face was sickly despite its bronze, and drawn with what might have been pain, worry, or sleeplessness. Jimmy devoutly hoped it was all three. Stimpson failed to see him in his angry expostulation, and Jimmy saw no object in a meeting.

"I'd like to know if he was trying to meet her or making the trip to Aztec," he mused as he got into the cab. "She didn't seem to be expecting any one. Anyhow, he missed both his chances. I hope his ribs hurt him."

He thrashed out his decision on the way back to the hotel. His first move was to the writing room, where he penned a letter that he addressed to New York:

DEAR DAD:

There are other things besides Jerusalem Copper. I am going in for a strictly commercial enterprise that for sheer economics has got a flivver factory lashed to the mast. I've an idea a few hard knocks won't hurt me, and I'll let you know how I come out. Don't worry about me. I'm spelling my wild oats with a "g" prefixed to the last word, and I am still your hopeful and affectionate son

JIMMY.

"That will keep the governor guessing," he chuckled as he sealed the letter. "Boy!"

"Page Mr. James Amber," he ordered. "Tell him Mr. Hollister is waiting for him to have lunch."

CHAPTER V

SAN JUAN COUNTY

AZTEC is the county seat of San Juan County, New Mexico. It is six thousand-odd feet skyward in the angle formed by the rivers of La Plata and Las Animas as they tumble through their cañons to join the turbulent San Juan. The full title of the second stream is *El Rio de las Animas Perdidas*—the River of Lost Souls—and Jimmy, after he had surveyed the locality, decided that the name was a good one to give a comprehensive idea of the neighbourhood.

He found some Government land on a mesa that lifted to a peak aptly named Diablo, a black mass of burned-out rock jutting from among subordinate hills.

“It looks like the land that God forgot and the devil appropriated,” he told himself as he surveyed his little domain after the formalities of “taking up” had been accomplished. He was sweltering beneath the scanty protection of a tent when he spoke, and his description was biased. His land was not altogether barren.

Much of it was covered with gramma grass, the ideal of luxury for his goats; some of the hills were fairly well timbered with scrub-oak, juniper, and piñon, and the rest furred with sagebrush, greasewood, and cactus thickets. But he had found a tarantula on his quilt that morning and seen several rattlesnakes and a Gila monster during his tour of inspection.

It was the utter loneliness of the place that oppressed him. His nearest and only neighbours lay beyond a deep and narrow cañon, its bottom a dry watercourse, its sides honeycombed with ancient cliff dwellings—the country of a long-departed race.

It was the identity of the neighbour that had decided him upon the location. It was Richard Dane, the Shepherd of the Long Wools and owner of the Curly O ranch.

“It’s no place for a white man, let alone a white girl,” muttered Jimmy, who was forming the habit of talking to himself. “What in thunder a bustling old crook like the Shepherd finds in a dump like this is beyond me. The ‘stuff’ he is sending up to Stimpson must be rich. It’s a rotten shame to bury Deborah in such a hole.”

He had seen nothing of her nor of any of the denizens of the Curly O. He had not yet invaded the ranch. From his side of the cañon he could see only the thin line of the barbed-wire fence

against the sky. The buildings were hidden in some fold of the hills and so far he had seen no stock. In Aztec he had gleaned little information.

"A rum old cuss who knows as much about cattle as a sidewinder does about playin' the mouth-organ," summed up one informant. There was a brother, he learned, and three other men.

Jimmy had decided not to force a meeting. If there was any reason for the girl's attitude against his coming to San Juan County he did not want to distress her unduly, and he was young enough to believe in a lucky chance ultimately bringing her in his path.

His Angoras were not due from Albuquerque for several uncertain days of freight-time reckoning, and in the meantime he had to secure a herder who knew more of the ways of goats than he did. The goatman who had travelled with him as far as Durango Junction had advised him to secure a *mestizo*, or halfbreed Indian, but so far he had not been able to find one who was not incurably afflicted with a combination of drunkenness and laziness.

The fence along the brink of the cañon seemed unnecessary. Unless the steers were given to suicide, the precipice itself appeared to be sufficient barrier for its length. It was the natural line between Jimmy's land and that of his neighbour. He

was not sure to whom the cañon belonged. As it was largely air space, it might be considered neutral. The deep, wedge-shaped rift ended where a rough trail led to the arid stream bed near the northern limit of both holdings.

So far he had not explored it. It had been too hot to do anything but practise with his automatic pistol, redeemed from the stingy pawnbroker in Colorado Springs. He found that a steady nerve and a good eye rapidly aided him to get the hang of the weapon. The day he succeeded in potting two prairie dogs in succession on the top of their mounds he felt he had graduated.

In sheer desperation he decided to descend into the cañon and explore some of the cliff dwellings. He left his pony grazing, hobbled in a grassy hollow, by the little spring that was one of his land's most valuable possessions, and made his way on foot to the head of the cleft, wishing to spare his mount the hard scramble down the trail after a morning's ride to Aztec and back again in the vain search for a helper.

He repented his generosity several times before he reached the grateful shade of the cañon walls, but the Hollister strain of determination and endurance held him to his quest.

The name of the time-worn corridor of the mountains was Turquoise Cañon, named, Jimmy

learned, from the legend of an ancient Indian mine rich in free gold found in the turquoise matrix. Rumour had it that the Navajos, herded in their near-by reservation, still guarded jealously the secret of the gold they could no longer exploit but would not suffer their white conquerors to enjoy.

There were grisly tales current of expeditions of less settled days that had resulted in disaster, the search ending with the flight of Indian arrows and the crunching of bones by the coyotes. No one had found the old working. The vague hope of discovery gave a needed zest to Jimmy's toilsome expedition. It would be a quicker way of getting rich than goat-raising, he felt, wishing he had that animal's facility for climbing as he scrambled down the narrow track.

The thought struck him that Deborah's father might have discovered the mine, but he could see no reason for secrecy unless it was fear of the Indians. The reservation was close by. The San Juan River formed a part of its border just west of where the La Plata flowed in. But the Navajos were pacific and well guarded. It was more likely, he decided, that there was some prior claim, Governmental, a part of the Indian treaty, that Dane was ignoring.

The trail wound about shoulders of eroded lava blocks of which strewed the slopes in weird shapes

that suggested crouching monsters, giant skulls, and mammoth tortoises. Spanish bayonet and stunted cactus provided the only vegetation. Half the eastern wall was a vivid glare of burnt orange with violent purple shadows marking fissures and buttress. The western wall was a cooler gray, its formation outline in deeper tone. The dry watercourse at the bottom showed as if gazed at through violet glass.

The openings of the cliff dwellings showed like black, yawning gullets. Tumbling, crumbling walls of square chambers and towers still remained upon platforms beneath overhanging ledges. Some of the ancient habitations were perched or inset halfway up the cliff. Nearly all were on the eastern side. Halting midway, Jimmy could trace indications of perilous trails between the fortress homes, though most of them, he decided, could only have been reached by long-ago-rotted ladders.

He heard the sudden click of a horse's shoe against a stone. Someone was coming up the trail. Where he stood it was a narrow path worn from the almost vertical face of the wall. He scrambled up to a projecting boulder to give the climbers right of way.

A man on a roan horse that panted heavily beneath heat and weight came into view. Beyond the sharp sound of the shoe progress had been

noiseless in the thick dust of the trail until the horse's breathing became manifest. Behind the first rider came three others.

The leader was a bull-necked young giant, his sun-crisped face powdered with dust. Two others followed closely, tanned, unshaven, and unkempt. Some distance behind toiled a pinto pony bearing a man who Jimmy instantly placed as Shepherd Dane. His long, white beard wagged wearily to the horn of his saddle; his heavy, shapeless body sagged to the jerk of the labouring beast.

The cavalcade was abreast of Jimmy before they noticed him. The leader bestowed upon him a glance of astonished anger, and the rest followed suit. Only the Shepherd answered Jimmy's friendly hail.

"There's nothing down there worth looking at, stranger," he said. "No water. Just the bare bones of rocks, and rattlesnakes by the million."

"That why you're coming out?" asked Jimmy, cheerfully.

The younger man looked at him morosely, opened his lips to speak, and changed his mind. The four passed slowly up the trail, turned a corner, and were lost to view.

"Nice, social crowd," commented Jimmy. "Ride like a lot of shoe-clerks, and guns enough for a landing party. So that's the Shepherd!

And the amiable chap in front was her brother, I imagine. She seems to have the only smile in the family. They seem awful stingy with their cañon. But they didn't say they owned it. I'm going down."

The farther Jimmy explored the floor of the cañon the less became his interest in cliff dwellings and in the lost Indian mine workings. The transparent shadow screen that had made the cañon floor look so comparatively cool from above proved utterly deceptive. He seemed to be walking on the bed of a recently drawn furnace.

He explored one or two of the lower ruins and was rewarded by the discovery of some broken pottery. There were no indications of water, and that in his canteen was more than tepid when he tried to assuage a swiftly increasing thirst. He decided that, unless unusual temptation offered, he would henceforth leave Turquoise Cañon to the rattlesnakes the Shepherd had mentioned. So far Jimmy had not seen any, but he did not doubt their presence on their basking ledges.

The stony bottom held no regular trail to his untrained eye nor could he trace the movement of the Curly O quartet. The cañon maintained its deep and narrow formation for several miles before it widened out with lowering cliffs to the La Plata watershed.

It was probable, thought Jimmy, that they used the way they had come up out of the cañon as entrance also. It was no pleasure trip and only a strong incentive could prompt an excursion in the scorching defile.

Jimmy's concern in that incentive waned as the heat seemed to wax. He turned midway to a three-storied dwelling that had tempted search and started back. The vicious *whir-r-r* of a rattlesnake, close to his right, startled him. He whirled to face his danger and saw the lower half of a naked leg, covered with leathery brown skin, attenuated so that the tendons showed plainly, flexed from knee to footsole between two boulders.

At the first glimpse he thought it was the leg of a dead man, or that of a mummy dragged from a cave by some sacrilegious marauder. Then it twitched as the snake's warning sounded once again. Apparently the reptile was close to the body.

Jimmy cautiously mounted the rocks. Wedged between them lay the body of an old Indian clad only in a breech clout. His coarse, iron-gray hair, reaching to his shoulders, was matted with blood above one temple. On a side ledge of one of the boulders, level with the man's thigh, was coiled the largest rattlesnake that Jimmy had ever seen. Its girth was as great as that of the Indian's

leg and its blunt, bony head, shaped like a wedge, was elevated on a scaly length that held it in a menacing poise.

A forked tongue flickered from its mouth. Its beady eyes seemed covered with a film, and it turned its head uneasily from side to side. At his footfall it struck, flinging its jaws, not at him, but at the Indian. As it recoiled Jimmy saw plainly the dark punctures of its fangs in the brown flesh. He fired at the upraised head and the bullet smashed it, spattering the boulder with blood and lead. The writhing stump of the neck spurted blood and the great body, five feet in length, threw itself in its convulsions upon that of the Indian.

Jerking it away and flinging the twisting bulk far across the cañon, Jimmy knelt beside the prostrate man, whose eyes were open. The echoing crash of the heavy automatic, coupled with the shock of the snake-bite, had brought him back from an unconsciousness the source of which was indicated by the wound at his temple.

He looked with a calm, unwondering gaze at Jimmy, speaking in strange syllables. These he changed for fairly fluent Spanish.

"Si," said Jimmy. "*Yo hablo Mexicano.*"

A summer cruise in the West Indies had given him a working knowledge of Spanish and he had little difficulty in establishing an understanding.

"The snake has bitten you," he said. "We must do something for it."

"It is no use, señor. That was the third time. The snake must have been blind and soon to lose its skin, for it struck the first time without warning. I shall die. I thank you, señor, but it is of no use."

Horried, Jimmy noticed for the first time how greatly swollen one leg already was in comparison to the other. The man seemed doomed, but he took his neckerchief, a stone, and a stick, and attempted a tourniquet.

"I shall die, señor, unless I could drink the *yerba buena*. And it grows only on the top of the cliff."

"What is it like?" asked Jimmy. "I'll get you some."

The Indian feebly shook his head.

"It is much like many others. Unless I showed you—I know where it grows—at the head of the cañon—but I could not tell you so that you could find it. Give me instead a drink of water—if you have it."

The sentences were jerky. The man was succumbing to the narcosis of the virus. Jimmy put his canteen to the cracking lips and looked about him despairingly. He could not let the man die without some supreme effort.

The Indian was emaciated from age and of small stature. Jimmy hastily guessed his weight at under a hundred and thirty pounds, sixty less than his own muscular heft.

He stooped and picked up the Indian, now rapidly becoming comatose. The body was lighter than he had imagined. But it was a long way to the top of the cañon with a narrow path on the steep pitch for the final pull. Jimmy set his jaw and packed his burden at an arm-carry until he reached the foot of the trail.

Then he sat down the limp body on its face, stepped astride it, lifted it to its knees and feet and, at last, the sweat dripping from him, held the Indian across his back in the "fireman's lift," his right arm passing between the Indian's legs slung across his right shoulder, his hand grasping the other's right wrist; a trick he had learned on camping trips.

It was an arduous task he had given himself and it seemed a useless one, but he persevered. His head was splitting, his throbbing pulses created a roaring in his ears, and he tottered up the last few yards of the ascent to the rim and dropped exhausted and almost as lifeless as his burden.

Jimmy forced himself back to energy. The tourniquet had shifted. He sought for the main artery of the thigh and, pressing hard to the bone,

found it faintly pulsating. He readjusted the bandage with the stone against the artery and tried desperately to shake the dying man back to consciousness.

Had it been a white man he would have failed, but the Indian's spark of vitality was stubborn and the coördination of brain and body instinctive and apt. Jimmy saw a gleam of intelligence between the slowly lifting lids.

"The *yerba buena*. Where?"

He repeated the syllables distinctly.

"Raise me."

He held the Indian in a sitting posture while the latter's eyes feebly roved over the ground, struggling to retain their power.

"There, by the big stone," he muttered.

Jimmy followed his fading glance and bore him swiftly to the boulder. The ground was densely matted with small-leaved herbage. It seemed all alike to Jimmy's eyes, but the Indian, scraping aside the growth with feeble, clawlike hands, selected some of the fleshy foliage and stuffed his mouth with it, chewing it, swallowing the juice, and ejecting the pulpy residue.

"Take plenty in plenty of water and boil," he said. "Perhaps—if it is not too late."

He fell back in a strangling vomit. Jimmy collected the rest of the herb, a double handful of

clammy leaves and stems from which dripped a milky, sticky juice, and ran at the best pace he could muster to his tent.

He grabbed a saucepan and his matches, started a fire, and thrust the utensil into the flames that he fed with dried greasewood until they roared, while he stirred the brew. It boiled to scum, and he caught it up and hurried back, fearful of spilling a drop, unable to use his pony's speed.

The Indian lay quiet, arms outstretched, his leg terribly swollen below the tourniquet. To remove the bandage was to let the poison enter the body; to leave it threatened mortification. The man seemed practically dead and Jimmy decided upon desperate means and left the bandage undisturbed. He managed to part the clenched teeth with his knife blade and poured some of the hot liquid into the mouth, holding the nostrils and stroking the throat to ensure swallowing.

With a gurgling contraction some of it disappeared, and he tried it again. Before half of the brew was gone the Indian's body was twisted in convulsions that threatened to tear him apart, followed by violent retching and vomiting that continued for half an hour and left him limp and soggy with perspiration.

"I shall live now, señor," he said. "In a little while I will drink the rest, and to-morrow I shall

be well again. I am your servant. My head is beneath your foot."

His eyes reinforced the gratitude of his speech. He still appeared too exhausted for movement, and Jimmy shifted him to the shadow side of the boulder.

"I am going to bring my pony," he said, "We'll get you to the tent somehow. Then you can rest all you want to."

With a low "Si" of satisfaction the Indian relaxed. The swelling in the leg appeared less puffy, and Jimmy severed the tourniquet, which had sunk deep into the flesh.

"I suppose," thought Jimmy, as he walked back for the horse, "that, having rescued the mysterious barbarian, he should reveal to me the secret of the mine and I should become a trillionaire overnight and bear off the imprisoned princess to a happy-ever-after marriage."

While he laughed at his own conceit, the thought shifted to a soberer investigation of his feelings.

"Am I really in love?" he asked himself. "Have I come down here for goats or matrimony?"

He gave up the attempt at self-analysis after a little while. Thus far he had acted upon impulse and he was disposed to let himself still drift upon whatever tide Fortune was sending him. In his inexperience he decided that he could hardly be in

love with a girl to whom he had only spoken twice, not understanding that the facts that he had championed her and that she had forbidden him to follow her provided a combination that was one of Cupid's most effective *coups*.

"I shall be lucky if my Indian turns out to know anything about goats," was his final summing-up after he had got his patient comfortable under canvas.

He was wearied to the last of his own strength when he finally stretched out beneath the stars, curled up in a blanket among the sage clumps.

CHAPTER VI

TEZAH

THE next morning Jimmy tended his Indian guest as best he could. The swollen leg was halfway to normal again, and Jimmy persuaded him to swallow some canned soup.

"My name is Tezah," said the Indian. "And I shall not forget, señor."

Beyond the one sentence he was taciturn, lapsing into heavy dozes from which he awoke drenched with sweat, and thirsty.

In mid-morning a man rode up from Aztec. The goats had arrived, a hundred in the herd, most of them expectant of increase. They were then on the way. Jimmy set a cup of water by Tezah's head, explained matters to him, and departed to look after his stock. He had already surrounded ten acres of heavy brush with his hog-fencing and into this inclosure, three hours later, he turned the animals with the pleasant thrill of ownership.

"A nice lot," said the man who had first ridden up as they watched the goats turn to in an endeavour to appease their Angoran appetites. "I

wish you luck. I see you've got the chief inside your tent."

"The chief?"

"So he claims. Great old character, Tezah! From the way the other Injuns treat him, I guess he's right. He lives with the Pueblo tribes, here and there. They think a lot of him and his story-tellin', but he don't belong to them. He ain't Navajo or South Ute, so he's free of the reservation. And he ain't Zuñi, though they say he talks their lingo. Is he goin' to herd for ye?"

"I don't know. He was bitten by a rattler and I found him."

Jimmy was not given to chant his own achievements.

"You're lucky if you get him," said the man. "Bein' a chief, he may be above herdin' goats, but you'll find he knows how to handle 'em. Them and sheep come natural to the Injuns hereabouts. So long. I've got to be beatin' it back to town."

When Jimmy went into his tent he found Tezah sitting up.

"Señor, your goats have come," he said. "I will be your herder."

"But they tell me you're a chief," said Jimmy. Tezah nodded.

"I am," he said, gravely. "Chief of the Yojillas. Once the cañon belonged to our tribe. But the

Pueblo people became too powerful and they drove us out. That was very long ago. And now, of all the Yojillas, I am the last. Yet if the tribe still flourished I would be their chief.

"So, when the white men ordered me from the cañon where all my people have lived and died and where their bones lie in the caves, I would not go. For it was the seventh moon of the year and I had come to worship the Aco."

He translated the Indian word into its Spanish equivalents, the "white stone."

"Long ago, soon after the earth split and made the cañon," he went on, "my people came from a land far to the south and east. There was famine there and sickness so that, except the very strong, nearly all the tribe died. The priests prayed to Quetzal and Quetzal came and stood upon a burning mountain and threw the Aco toward the western sun.

"Where the Aco rested we were to dwell. So the priests found the Aco where it had sunk into the cliff and knew that was the place appointed by Quetzal. The tribe grew strong and well and great in number. A stream flowed between the cliffs and there were trees and grass in those days. Also we found much gold. There is much there to-day but none can find it.

"Then, at last, because we lived too easily and

forgot how to fight, the Pueblo people drove us out. But, before we left, the priests and old men toiled while the rest fought and hid the gold. They, too, were killed but not until they had done their work. One was left and he fled with a few of the Yojillas to a refuge in the desert. Now am I the only one of all my people.

"When I told the white men that I worshipped the Aco they laughed and one struck me with his gun so that I fell. You know the rest, señor. My head is beneath your foot."

"Perhaps they have found the gold," said Jimmy.

"No, señor. For the father of my father saw the priest who fled. That was when he was very young and the priest very old. And the priest told him that the gold would never be found by those who sought for it and not until the Aco fell would any one find it. It was he who gave the secret of the *yerba buena*. Also he told the father of my father that he was Chief of all the Yojillas and he gave him this. It is yours, señor."

Tezah produced a flat fragment of turquoise matrix, bluish-green in colour, heavily starred with free gold. Jimmy took it, examined it, and gave it back.

"You keep it," he said. "And see here, about the goats——"

He hesitated. There was a dignity about the old man that made the question of wages seem incongruous.

"I'll be glad to have you help me. Suppose you give me your advice and help and take, say one-fifth of the kids for your share. I don't know much about how fast they breed but I should think that was fair."

"Señor," said Tezah, "I am an old man. Of what use are kids or gold to me? I do not wish to give gifts to the maidens nor to buy them for myself. Food and a fire, a blanket and a friend are all I need. And not those for nothing. In two days I shall stand. Then I shall make your herd fat and heavy of fleece and many as the rocks in the cañon."

"So be it," said Jimmy, simply, and stretched out his fingers for the handshake of compact.

Jimmy had a hundred occasions within the next few days to be thankful to Tezah. His ewes were kidding and many of the high-bred Angoras were inclined aristocratically to ignore their maternal functions. As he marvelled at the old chief's control of the wayward brutes he wondered what he would have done without him.

Night times they shared the tobacco that the other Jimmy and goatman had proclaimed good, and as the smoke puffs floated upward in the still

air, fragrant with herbs, the starry sky brooding above the silent purple hills about them, the soft bleat of the contented herd sounding occasionally. Jimmy, listening to the legends that Tezah told, felt the bond of humanity grow tense and the customs and conventions of the present-day world very far away. It was as if he sat in the quiet desert at the feet of a sage and learned to see things simply and at just the true values of humanity.

He had not forgotten the girl. Tezah was often silent, wrapped in the melancholy but prideful past, and then Jimmy's thoughts wandered, as the thoughts of young men will, to the one woman who had stirred him out of the circle of his own doings.

He resolved at last to pay a visit to the Curly O, persuading himself that the act would be a neighbourly one. To make the excuse more sufficient he killed a couple of young kids and dressed them to exchange for a quarter of beef or a side of veal. Ostensibly, at least, the owner of the Curly O was a cattleman. The request would be a natural one.

CHAPTER VII

THE CURLY O

JIMMY rode around the head of Turquoise Cañon in the early morning, his kids slung across his saddle. He found a horse trail and traced it to a gate rudely fashioned of barbed wire and a pole looped to a fence post, following the path upon the other side through a tract of sage. He passed a score of cattle at a muddy water-hole but saw no other signs of stock.

The trail led diagonally away from the cañon toward two buttes eroded into mushroom form by the lathe of wind and flood, and between them he caught sight of the long, low building of the Curly O headquarters. The ranch house was built of adobe brick with a brush thatch. Between the two stories projected the corrugated iron roof of a veranda that surrounded it on three sides. A fence of wire formed an enclosure about the house and a barn. Within it a straggling vegetable garden showed signs of intermittent culture.

Three men were sprawled out on chairs by the steps. A hound bayed and ran toward the gate as

Jimmy rode up and dismounted, leaving the pony's reins at trail. As he walked up to the house with the kids on his shoulder the dog sniffed around him, leaping upward at the meat.

The men laughed, but made no motion of reception. Jimmy saw a clothes-line at the side of the house on which hung a print gown and some aprons. His heart gave a sudden leap at the evidence of the girl's presence. He had begun to wonder if she was still there, and the swift pleasure of reassurance stripped him of any lingering delusions as to the purpose of his visit or the real reason for his establishment of the Capricorn Ranch, as he had named his holding.

Stopping at the foot of the steps he addressed the bull-necked man who had led the little cavalcade out of the cañon. His wrath was slowly rising at the derisive attitude of the men on the porch who affected to ignore his existence, but he held it in control.

"I thought you might want to trade beef or veal for a couple of young kids," said Jimmy in a voice he strove to hold casual, laying the carcasses across the railing of the steps and holding the gaze of the man he addressed.

The latter got up leisurely and descended to Jimmy's level. He was dressed in high boots and overalls with a flannel shirt open at the neck and

exposing a hairy chest. His sleeves were rolled up to the elbows and Jimmy noted the wonderful development of his upper body.

"That chap would make a star wrestler," he thought, as he waited for the other to speak.

"Likely looking flesh," said the man, poking the kids. "I'm sick of beef myself. Oh, dad!" he called, as he turned toward the house.

"I'm Jimmy Hollister. I'm raising goats across the cañon. Your name is Dane, isn't it?"

"That's my name. Here's dad. He'll talk with you."

So this was Deborah's brother—a surly, swaggering sort, Jimmy decided, puzzled as to whether his appeal to his father was born of filial duty or lazy dulness.

The door opened and the figure of the owner of the Curly O appeared, patriarchal and benevolent, dressed in gray tweeds, his long white beard well combed.

"Chap we met coming out of the cañon t'other day. Name of Hollister," said the younger Dane. "He's raising goats. Wants to trade for beef. How about it?"

Jimmy, conscious of the close scrutiny of the old man, remained with one foot on the first step, standing at ease. He nodded at the cursory introduction.

"Name of Hollister?" said Dane. "A young man raising goats? Quite pastoral. Jerry, get a quarter of beef."

One of the sitters stirred himself and vanished around the back of the house. Jimmy wondered where the girl was.

"You'll find them good eating," he said, pleasantly. "I'd like to trade this way every little while."

"Ah! You would. Well, I see no objection to that. Of the name of Hollister? And you are raising goats? You should do well with them if you give the business your close attention."

Jimmy felt that he was being played with by the bland old reprobate. He had figured on the chance of Stimpson having written about him, and dismissed it. Stimpson had no reason to think that he was going down to San Juan County. The girl might have mentioned him.

If he was to admit that he had worked for the man he would be either expected to bear a message showing him to be in some fashion in Stimpson's confidence or he would be suspected as a spy, unless—unless they guessed the real attraction.

The man returned with the quarter of beef, clumsily butchered with the hide on, far from being the work of expert or even accustomed hands.

Meanwhile, Jimmy sensed the strain of the situation.

The suave Shepherd had something up his sleeve, as perhaps he used to keep his winning cards, and the others regarded Jimmy with covert curiosity as of one in an inimical position who is presently to be exposed. Jimmy stood the chafe equably until he took up his beef and was ready to leave.

"Miss Dane well?" he asked.

"So!" The old man's sibilant exclamation was like the hiss of a freshly lit fuse. "You have met my daughter?"

"Yes. In Denver. At the Brown Palace Hotel."

Shepherd Dane's mild blue eyes concentrated themselves on his visitor. His son uttered a short, derisive laugh. The old man's voice purred.

"In Denver. At the Brown Palace. And you told her you were raising goats in San Juan County. Quite a coincidence."

He began to stroke his beard and the two men sauntered off the porch. The son edged nearer to Jimmy who, turning at the motion, caught a glare of ferocity in the other's eyes.

"I trust you were properly introduced," went on the Shepherd. "A girl who travels alone is subject to many annoyances. Even here"—his

voice grew suddenly hard—"she has to put up with many impertinences."

There was a snicker from behind Jimmy. One of the men who had left the porch was lolling at the gate of the enclosure, his gun hitched around so that it lay on his hip ready to the fingers that tapped its butt. Another stood by Jimmy's pony. Neither made any effort to hide their smiles. They were baiting him, he determined, waiting for him to give them provocation.

"I've got to be getting back," he said. "My man is waiting for me to work on a fence. I can assure you, Mr. Dane, that I have not intended any annoyance to Miss Dane. She would tell you that."

He saw the change he had hoped for in the announcement of his helper. The Shepherd ceased to stroke his beard, his son thrust his hands into his pockets with a subdued growl.

"So you have a man with you?" said Dane. "Then you must not keep him waiting. Let me give you a little advice. The more time you give to your chosen avocation the better it will succeed. Moreover, the air on this side of the cañon is distinctly unhealthy for those bred in the city. Also that of the cañon itself."

"Is the cañon on your property?" asked Jimmy.

He held the question to a show of civility but young Dane suddenly flared up.

"You'll find out if you don't keep away from it!" he blurted out. "You might as well know first as last that we don't propose to have any tenderfeet sneaking 'round our concerns. You and your goat ranch! Get back and play with your kids where you belong, you dude!"

Jimmy's eyes flashed and he swung back a ready fist. The old man came down the steps with surprising alacrity.

"Gently, son," he said. "We've given him the advice. I'm sure he'll take it. An ounce of advice, well taken, prevents a lot of trouble in case action becomes necessary. Good morning. You're forgetting your beef."

Jimmy fought hard against the impulse to hurl the mass of raw flesh into the jeering and hostile face of the younger Dane. Deliberately to provoke a fight would be equivalent to suicide with the odds against him and he reluctantly choked down his ire, picked up the quarter and walked to the gate, fastening the beef to his saddle while the others watched his every move.

As he rode off he heard their laughter but kept his pony's steady lope toward his own property.

"The old man doesn't want to raise a fuss," he reflected. "But I believe they'd have jumped me

if I hadn't given them the idea someone knew where I was. Confound their beef. I'd like to ram it down their throats. I hope the kid flesh chokes them instead."

He rode on steadily until he dismounted to pass through the gate.

"But I'm going to see Deborah," he said aloud as he remounted. "There's a mystery somewhere and there's something crooked about it. If she's in the crook it's because she can't get out of it. And I'm going to help her."

CHAPTER VIII

THE PATERAN

WITH Tezah's expert assistance the work on the Capricorn goat ranch became almost automatic after the kidding season was well over. In ten-acre lots the goats ate off the brush and passed on leaving the earth cleared and fertilized. The soil was light and Jimmy acquired a plow and harrow to which he attached the pony.

The holding began to take on the look of improved ground and he was justly proud of its appreciated value. The spring, he found, was supplied by several water veins which could be developed and an irrigating system later judiciously applied to the land.

Tezah worked with a will, starting a vegetable garden by the spring, seemingly absorbed in the welfare of the undertaking. But there were many days when Jimmy had literally nothing that he could do and he used them to ride about the country. The rare, invigorating air, the clean life, the sense of self-mastery and achievement,

combined to give him a feeling of health and confidence that he had never known before.

The long hours that might have led to laziness in a less vigorous personality inspired him with the power to think. His previous reliance on his own powers he now gauged as having been cocksureness. He gained something from the old chieftain's philosophy. He was maturing.

The problem of Deborah Dane he realized as a serious one. There were four men against him and his determination to free the girl from her surroundings. His belief in her freedom from any voluntary participation in the crooked doings of the Curly O never wavered. That these doings were criminal he felt assured. The Shepherd was not burying himself in such a country from choice. And his communication with the outer world through his daughter would leave too broad a trail if he was in hiding. Tying all this up with the warning to keep clear of the cañon convinced Jimmy that there was a deposit of some kind in the ravine that was being surreptitiously and illegally exploited.

He wondered if it was radium. He vaguely recollected some rumour or written statement about the Government having withdrawn its mining from the mineral rights granted the public in certain states. Constantly he tried to evolve

some means of communication with Deborah Dane. The next time he would clear up matters. He did not believe she was averse to him, and her constant presence in his thoughts and plans had made her seem very real and necessary in his existence.

Monte Diablo, the volcanic upthrust that obtruded at the highest point in the neighbourhood, possessed a natural trail that led to a ledge close to the top from which a wonderful view of the country stretched out to immense distances where far-off ranges lay clear in the crystalline atmosphere. The rock was west of the holdings of both the Curly O and the Capricorn Ranch and Jimmy, having once explored it, made it the usual object of his solitary expeditions, climbing to the ledge and leaving his pony to graze at Diablo's foot.

On his fourth trip his mount nickered, pricking up its ears as they neared the great chimney. A pinto horse was feeding on the turf and herbage. Jimmy rode up, loosening the automatic that he now carried in a holster at his belt which was always well supplied with extra clips for practice or more practical use against the coyotes that Tezah warned him would sooner or later attack his flock unless discouraged.

Glancing upward, he caught the flutter of a disappearing skirt. He experienced again the sen-

sation of his heart performing a somersault. Fortune had favoured him. It was Deborah Dane and in a place where she could not elude him.

He left the two ponies to make acquaintance and briskly climbed to the ledge. The girl was sitting on a loose fragment, gazing into space. She turned as he reached her level and he saw that she had been crying though all superficial traces of her tears had been wiped away.

Eager desire to take her in his arms and comfort her took forcible and instant possession of him, so fiercely that he found himself trembling at its intensity and his repression. Something of the impulse communicated itself to the girl for her frank look changed to a troubled one and she shifted uneasily.

Jimmy got a grip on himself and stayed motionless.

"Peach of a view, isn't it?" he said. His voice wobbled a trifle and he steadied it. "I often come up here," he went on. "Do you? I thought I was the original Cortez of this section. You know:

Cortez and his men
On a wild peak in Darien

discovering the Pacific and all that sort of thing."

The smile that came to her face was wan and forced, the very ghost of the radiance that he had once seen illumine it, Jimmy thought.

"I used to come here a good deal, once," she said. "But not for a long time until now."

"I'm glad you did," said Jimmy. "Now."

He had recovered his pose and started straight for the point.

"You told me not to come to Aztec," he said. "I did, and I'm settled across the cañon, raising goats. I called at your place the other day and they weren't overcordial, particularly when I inquired after you. What I want to know is, first, am I as objectionable to you as to the rest of the family? Because if I'm not I don't give a hang about the whole outfit, having met you again. Am I?"

"No." The word came faintly, but she emphasized it with a little shake of her head.

"Good news. Next, seeing we are going to be friends, what's the trouble?"

"I don't want to breeze into your private affairs," he went on as she remained silent. "If everything's all right just say so and I'll know that I'm an imaginative and inquisitive ass. But that isn't going to stop me from seeing you. You were crying before I came up," he said, sitting down beside her. "You're not the kind of a girl to cry for nothing. I saw that at Stimpson's. Won't you let me help you?"

The sincerity of his manhood rang clearly in his

speech. Her eyes met his and stayed there for a moment and once more the bridge of understanding and liking was established between them. Jimmy had put out his hand and she clasped it. Some mysterious current sprang into existence from the contact, blending their beings into the mutual fellowship of mated maid and man. It held them silent for a while. Then Deborah Dane broke it with a little sigh.

"You cannot help me now," she said. "To try would be dangerous for you and would do me no good. I am in trouble, but much of it is, perhaps, imaginary. I have been very lonely"—she smiled at him as she used the past tense—"and there are things going on that I do not understand, things that I am afraid to try to find out about—because——"

"Because they affect your father and your brother—and yourself?" asked Jimmy as she faltered.

She nodded.

"They have acted strangely of late. Father has been very nervous and irritated. My brother is—different. I have never been very much with them until we came down here. We have seldom lived long in one place, except in Denver. Father had many friends that he did not allow me to see. He was seldom home.

"He was always kind and, when we had money, generous. Sometimes we had plenty and then we would be very poor again. Often that, since I came back from school.

"You heard what Stimpson said to me."

She faced Jimmy squarely, her face flushed but her eyes steady.

"He said that my father had promised I should marry him. I did not believe it, but he—he does not deny it. Stimpson has some hold over him, of course. He told me that if I married Stimpson it would get him out of difficulties that he could see no other way of freeing himself—and us—from.

"My brother heard us talking and he was furious. I think they would have fought about it if I had not separated them. That was why my father did not tell me of Stimpson's letter and his own promise. He was afraid of my brother and afraid of Stimpson. And he is not a man who is easily cowed. One thing is settled: I am not to go to Stimpson any more.

"But I hear them quarrelling every night after I have gone upstairs. Some days they snarl at each other like strange dogs. It is like living on the brink of a volcano. Sometime there is going to be an eruption.

"They quarrelled about you, with dad, for letting you get away. Stimpson wrote about a

man he had employed who had found out something. How much he was not sure. He did not mention your name but they suspect you are the same one. Since you said you met me in Denver they have watched me more closely. They follow me sometimes through field glasses. One of them watches from the top of one of the buttes.

"Sometimes I have thought dad was going to tell me what it is all about but was afraid to. Whenever I have gone to Stimpson's I have taken some heavy boxes in my trunk. I believe there is gold in them and that it comes from the cañon. But there's some mystery about it and I think—I am afraid that it does not really belong to them."

Her face worked pitifully and Jimmy looked away.

"If I can help you," he said, "will you let me know?"

"If I am able to. They sent me upstairs when they saw you coming the other day. I could see you through my window and I was afraid you would be hurt."

Jimmy's spirit grew stout within him and a glow warmed him from crown to sole. To have a girl—the girl—be afraid for you, was to reduce the cause of fear to a minimum.

"If we are once seen together," she said, "they will keep me close to the ranch house."

"Then we'll have to do that only when it's absolutely necessary."

Jimmy's voice held a doleful note that seemed to act paradoxically upon the girl for she smiled at him and he filed the smile for future recollection. He was beginning to count those swift illuminations that transformed her from a normal, red-headed girl into a radiant, aureoled being, eminently vital and kindly.

"You can let me know how things are," he said. "I've thought it all out. Now that I've met you, it's easy. We'll make a pateran." She looked puzzled. Jimmy explained.

"A pateran is a token used by the gipsy folk. Some combination of twigs dropped in a trail to show which way one has gone or leave a message. They look like wind-blown twigs to the ordinary eye. We can take a spray of scrub-oak with the cups on it and a sprig of pine! Twist the two together and let the pateran fall.

"If the acorns are in the cups I shall know all's well. If they are out, that you need me. Drop them somewhere on the trail between your line fence and Diablo here and I'll find them. I'll return the message in another place so you'll know I've got it."

"I understand."

"And here's another plan."

Jimmy produced a gold-cased pencil that was attached to his watch-chain and found an envelope. On the blank side of the back he rapidly set down a series of dots and dashes with the symbols of the alphabet opposite them.

"This is the International or Continental Morse Code," he said. "I used to have a yacht once with wireless on it" and I learned how to send and receive messages."

He looked at her in the sudden thought that she knew nothing of him beyond the fact that he had been a rider for Stimpson and was now a breeder of Angoras. She nodded.

"I did not suppose you had always done this sort of thing," she said.

"I'm trying to make good on my own account," said Jimmy. "I am not a remittance man or a ne'er-do-well exactly. But I started out to show my father that I could get along on my own hook and, while I haven't made any great success of it so far, I'm getting along. I'll tell you all about it some day."

"I should love to hear it," she said. "What am I to do with this?"

"Learn it. Tap it out whenever you are by yourself. You can see the sun set behind Diablo from your house?"

"Yes. I often watch it."

"The angle of difference between your viewpoint and my tent can be only a few minutes. I shall be at the corner of your line fence for half an hour every night at sundown. If you want to send me a message tap it out on the barbed wire. The top strand seems taut. Don't use it too often as they might detect it and suspect something. There are some abbreviations at the end of the code. I shall be there every evening."

"You are awfully good to me," she said.

"I want to be," answered Jimmy, simply.

"But you don't know anything about me. I don't know much about myself. I'm almost afraid to find out."

Jimmy smiled.

"What you find out isn't going to make any difference to me."

She rose to her feet with a light in her eyes that sent the glow tingling through him again.

"I hope it isn't. I've got to be going. They might take a notion to look for me. I'll learn the code, and I'll not forget about the paterans. Good-bye."

He followed her down the trail and set his hand for her footmount, watching her as she rode away. Then he apostrophized his pony.

"Solo, you solemn-faced equine, if any one had told me or any of our crowd that Jimmy Hollister

would be riding 'round looking for sprays of scrub-oak and pine, or waiting every night for a barbed-wirephone message from a girl, they would think the aforesaid Jimmy Hollister a quixotic chump who had suddenly gone crazy.

"But I'm not crazy, Solo. I'm just beginning to show signs of sanity. Maybe I'm in love. It begins to look like it—and I feel like it. And the first move in that game is to clear Deborah from the mess that precious father and brother of hers have stirred up, whatever it is. She has more than an idea that it's not what it ought to be and that she's smeared with their villainy.

"Not interested, eh! Just for that you can lope all the way home."

He swung himself to the saddle of the indifferent Solo and galloped for the Capricorn holding.

CHAPTER IX

UNTO THE THIRD GENERATION

THE days went swiftly by. Jimmy sent his first consignment of kids to market and applied the proceeds to the building of a simple two-story bungalow. The quick absorption and radiation of the sun by the sandy soil produced swift changes of temperature and there were nights and early mornings when the thermometer registered under thirty degrees and made the tent a cold and cheerless abode.

Lumber and a carpenter came out from Aztec and Jimmy helped the man with a zest that soon produced results. But every day he rode trail between the Curly O fence and Diablo and every sunset he listened to catch a message over the barbed-wire phone.

Paterans he found almost daily and dropped his in return. The cups always held acorns and no taps sounded along the fence. He saw nothing of the girl save two distant glimpses, with once an arm wave, but his love fed lustily upon even such scanty fare. He had no one to talk to about it.

Tezah seemed too remote from his generation; neither did he feel like discussing it with the Indian, who disappeared for a day and a night and reappeared with an Indian pony, which he used in his herding. Solo was absolutely unsatisfactory and the carpenter an impossible confidant. Jimmy went about his work humming, in such evident harmony with everybody and everything that the carpenter, a fiddle-faced individual with a troublesome cough, commented on it.

"I wish I hed yore good sperrits," he said, as they sat shingling the roof of Capricorn Lodge. "I'm meloncholy by nater, myself. I've got dyspepsy and I have to live here 'count of my cough, and I'd give a heap to feel the way you do. I like to figger, nights, outside of my contracts, and I've figgered out the average number of nails a good workman drives in a lifetime."

"Yes," asked Jimmy. "How many?"

"Not counting brads or window-glass points, one million and ninety-five thousan' seven hundred and thirty-eight. I've driv' more'n a million already and every time I hit one—like this"—he sent home a nail with a quick double stroke—"it sez 'one less.' Jest like drivin' nails in yore own coffin, so to speak. You wouldn't look at it thet way now, would ye?"

"Not me," said Jimmy, deftly splitting a shingle.

"I'd call it 'one more,' and hope it went in straight."

Such was his general outlook. Every task was something to be tackled cheerfully. He had a fancy sometimes that Deborah was beside him and he wondered how she would like the house, insisting upon big closets despite the carpenter's protest.

"Jest wastin' lumber, unless you're aimin' to get married," he said. "In thet case you're savin' time. If wimmin was architects, houses 'ud have ten closets and three rooms."

Jimmy felt his face flush under the bronze. He countered to hide his confusion.

"Ever married yourself?"

"Three times. One died, t'other got a divorce, an' the third run away with a Mexican. Don't try it. It's jest plumb hell, take it from me. Which side do you want the verandy on?"

"Looking west. Let's go to it."

Tezah's tales during the evening smokes began to smack of romance. Jimmy began to suspect some purpose in the constant string of cliff-leaping lovers and forlorn maidens changed to wailing water and wind spirits, and one night he tested the idea.

"Haven't you anything more cheerful? What's the matter with your war stories?"

The chief's eyes twinkled.

"The love of a man for a maiden is a good thing," he said. "Even when the end is sorrowful it is good while it holds. For there are four things in a man's life that are good: to eat, to fight, to love, and to listen to the talk of children. Is it not so, señor?"

Jimmy, relighting his pipe, nodded.

"The señor loves a maid?"

Jimmy did not fence with the old man.

"How did you know?" he asked.

Tezah chuckled.

"The antelope mates. He snorts and runs fast and leaps in the spring."

Jimmy laughed.

"Do I do that?"

"As a man does such things. And the señor brings often home a token that he does not throw away. In the señor's room are many sprays that have faded but still look fair and smell sweet to him. And there are always fresh ones in a glass. There is one now in the señor's pocket."

Jimmy glanced at the spray set in his shirt above his heart.

"Perhaps you're right, Tezah. Wish me luck?"

"Señor, I do. I have prayed to the Aco. But you do not need my wish. You carry Luck with you. When a man's shoulders are square, as yours are, Luck rides easily upon them."

Jimmy, knocking out the ashes of his pipe, sighed. He wished Luck would bring him in touch with Deborah.

He rode out to Diablo the next afternoon. The house was finished and the melancholy carpenter had departed.

"We'll go back to New York, of course," mused Jimmy, day-dreaming on the ledge. "Dad and Deborah are going to get along in fine shape. But we'll keep the ranch and come out once in a while to Capricorn Lodge. I'll give it to Tezah on that condition. This country grips you hard."

He walked to the limit of the ledge and looked toward his land. To the north a faint line of shifting purple rose above the hills that marked the boundary of the holding. Jimmy gazed intently. There was little haze in the New Mexico atmosphere, none on days like this.

The line lifted and swiftly increased in density, rolling upward in clouds that were unmistakably smoke. As he looked he saw a sudden crease of fire below it like the blood that follows a swift knife slash.

He leaped down the trail to his pony. The Capricorn Ranch was afire. There was practically no wind, but between the hills and the cañon the grazing land was thickly furred with brush, highly

inflammable at that season. The flames would create their own draft and sweep the land as a storm drives dead leaves.

His goats were south of the house, between it and Turquoise Cañon. He had built by the spring. The boggy land there might split the fire and hold it for a time but the conflagration would circle it before long.

Solo drummed across country, his belly to the ground. Topping a rise, Jimmy saw with a groan that the flames had reached the spring head and divided. He could hear their low roar as they rushed on beneath the smoke rapidly assuming the shape of a great U.

He knew that Tezah would stay with the goats until the last moment but already they were practically cut off. The timid animals would not face the fire and back of them was the cañon. He could see masses of the burning scrub tossed above the smoke pall, caught by the draft and hurled ahead to start fresh patches of flame.

"Tezah's Luck has tumbled off my shoulders with a vengeance," thought Jimmy, bitterly. "The whole thing gone up in smoke! I wonder if we can back-fire and save the herd and the house."

The sides of the burning U began to form a crescent. Solo snorted at the pungent smoke but Jimmy urged him around the nearer horn of fire

and sped toward the house, half a mile away in the green valley watered by the spring. He heard the blat of the frightened goats.

Two figures were running along the line of the farther curving arm of the fire—Tezah and another man he did not recognize. They stopped from time to time and little spurts of flame sprang up and began to join in a line where the two had ignited the dry grass and herbage.

“Back-firing!” cried Jimmy. “Bully for Tezah. I’ll tackle this side!”

He looked around to see if he was far enough ahead of the flames, feeling for his matches. A rider was racing toward him, just rounding the barrier of smoke and fire that had almost reached the cañon and was curving in to complete the circle about the house and herd.

It was Deborah. Her pinto pony, with nostrils flaring, came pounding on, tossing its head wildly, the girl firm in the saddle. He saw the flash of her eyes and the steady set of her mouth and chin as she dashed up and dismounted by his side.

“I saw the smoke across the cañon,” she said, “and I guessed you were in danger. What can I do?”

Jimmy gave her one glance of eminent appreciation.

“We’ll fight it back. Take these matches and

light the brush every dozen yards. Work up toward the spring."

He gave her half his store and ran ahead on foot toward the cañon and worked back, back-firing as he went. Deborah crouched and struck a match on her boot heel, touching the burning splinter to a tuft of grass. It flared up and she started another spot nearer the house, following the base of the little hills that helped to hold the valley still unscathed in its greenness. Her task completed, Deborah turned to rejoin Jimmy.

They met midway to the cañon. Their back-fire was climbing the slope bravely to meet the main conflagration, leaving a blackened track of safety clear from fuel. The heat seared them where they stood, scorching their lungs and forcing them to retreat a little. Flakes of brush flew above them in glowing masses and kindled little fires that they stamped out swiftly. But the main blaze was checked.

A mass of sparks lit on Deborah's riding skirt and smoldered rapidly, eating the cloth. Jimmy smothered it with his hands.

"You've burned them," she said. "Let me see them?"

Jimmy closed his fingers over his blistered palms but she would not be denied and, taking his hands in hers, unrolled his fists.

"It's nothing," he said. "A little grease will fix it. You're not burned?"

"No. My father and the rest are at the ranch," she went on. "Somebody came late last night, on foot I think, and left before morning. That has put them in a good humour and they have been playing cards together since breakfast. For the last five days they have been in the cañon."

Jimmy understood her eagerness to acquit the Curly O from any charge of being incendiaries and reassured her.

"Lots of things to start a fire in this weather. We've saved the herd and the house, anyway, thanks to you and whoever has been helping Tezah. I shall never forget your coming to aid me. You might have been cut off. You——"

Jimmy spoke with eyes more eloquent than his words but she checked him with a glance back of him. The man who had been with Tezah was coming toward them across the unburned ground. Sweat glistened on the bald dome of his uncovered head and the end of his long beard was singed. With a shout Jimmy welcomed Amber, and the goatman hailed him in return.

"I jest come along 'n time. I was aimin' to visit ye and I've got a message. I saw the fire as I rode up and I turned to and helped your *campero*

fight it. Come prit' nigh t' gettin' away with ye, didn't it?"

Jimmy introduced him to Deborah and they shook hands. Amber made no mention of her father and the three watched the sullen defeat of the flames.

The head of the little oval watered by the spring had resisted the fire. The back-fire still fought the invader on the hillsides, but the fury of the attack was exhausted and the conflagration practically at an end.

Of Jimmy's original six hundred and forty acres only a narrow strip from the spring to the cañon was saved, less than an eighth of his holding. But Capricorn Lodge was saved and Tezah was quieting the herd. Jimmy looked grimly at the prospect.

"The land is pretty well cleared, at any rate. No need for the goats to trim it."

"It'll be up in a few months," said Amber. "The ashes'll fertilize what of it you want to plow and the rest'll be in shape for the goats again. There must be free range you can use. You can't fence it. You'll have to herd but you've got a good *campero* in your Indian. He shaped fine buckin' the fire."

Jimmy's nod gave emphasis to his reply.

"He's a wonder." The loss of his grazing had

left him undismayed, buoyed by the exhilaration of Deborah's presence and her bravery. "Come over to the house," he suggested. "We need sprucing up a bit."

They looked at each other and laughed. Their faces were scorched and smutted and their clothes in worse shape with burns and smears. But Deborah demurred.

"I must get back before they miss me. But I should like to see your house."

Tezah met them by the goat fence with news.

"It was an Indian who started it, señor. I was at the spring when I saw him passing through the willows. He was a yellow face. An Apache, I think. I called to him but I was with a ewe that had two new-born kids and I could not leave them. He did not answer but went on between the hills."

Jimmy translated for Deborah's benefit.

"Had any trouble with Injuns?" asked Amber. "Don't seem likely an Apache would range this far north. Still, he ought to know. Sure it was an Injun?" he asked Tezah.

"I think so, señor. I could not see well through the willows but he had a yellow face."

"Humph!" Amber suddenly slapped his thigh. "I'll wager it was the Chink I met on the road up. My horse shied at him. He looked as if he'd rather not have met any one. A fat, yellow-faced

Chink with his queue cut off or under his hat! Black sombrero?" he asked Tezah. "Black trousers and black silk shirt?"

"Si, señor."

"That settles it. That's your man, Hollister. Hard to catch now, I reckon, since he met me and knows your *campero* sighted him."

Jimmy and the girl looked at each other, a mutual thought in their eyes. Jimmy voiced it.

"Ah Fung! Then Stimpson isn't far away. Perhaps he was at your house last night."

She shook her head. "Not Stimpson. I couldn't hear anything but murmur, but the strange voice wasn't deep enough for Stimpson's."

Her face was so troubled that Amber instinctively turned aside to speak with Tezah. Jimmy and the girl entered the house together. She stood by the table, talking quickly, her face flushed.

"I have brought this on you. I warned you not to come to Aztec. I know they are trying to drive you away. I've heard them talking about it. They have got dogs on the place that they are keeping hungry for some horrible purpose they treat as a jest. And now——"

There were tears in her eyes, welled from anger and distress. Jimmy took both her hands and held them as he answered her gravely:

"Now see here, Deborah. You have got noth-

ing to do with any grudge your folks may have against me. It's a good deal on your account, I'll grant that, but if you warned me twenty times to stay away from Aztec and there were twenty men at the Curly O instead of four, I'd be here just the same and I'd stick. Your troubles are my troubles. If Stimpson's here you need me more than ever. It's time for action and plain talking. Do you know why I wanted you to see my house?"

She shrank from him suddenly with a cry of protest.

"Don't. Please don't! If you want to do something for me, go away, for my sake and your own. There can never be anything between us. You are different. Your people are not like my people."

She spoke half hysterically and Jimmy tried to soothe her.

"It doesn't make the slightest difference about our people. You've been worrying yourself that your father and brother and Stimpson are mixed up in some crooked deal. Maybe they are. Maybe not. You're not and I'm not. As long as we love each other——"

Deborah stood against the wall, her arms outspread against it as if she would have forced her way through.

"If—if I did love you, that would be just the

reason for you to go away. It's bred in my blood."

"Nonsense!"

He tried to take her in his arms but she ran around the table to the door with so wild a look of distress that he halted.

"Oh, why don't you understand? A taint like that does not die out."

Her face was blazing crimson as her lips. As Jimmy looked at her a light broke on him. The tenderness he felt for her was vibrant in his voice.

"I think I do understand. But we'll risk that."

"No—no!"

With a quick movement she fled through the door and ran to her pony that Tezah had caught and hitched to a post by the veranda. She un-snapped the halter with eager fingers, mounted and, with a cut of her quirt, went flying toward the cañon. Jimmy looked after her with his heart in his eyes.

"You're not going to run away from me like that, honey," he said to himself, "not for all your worry about the sins of the father and the third generation stuff."

CHAPTER X

TARGET PRACTICE

JIMMY was forced to dismiss temporarily the problem of Deborah while he listened to the news of his visitor, who had travelled so far to see him.

"I was in Denver last week," said Amber. "I put up at the Palace. I saw your name on the register and you can bet it looked good to me. Clerk said the party was in and I waltzed up to the room an' breezed in on an old gent straight as an arrer an' lookin' jest as sharp an' gen'ally effective. Then I see my mistake, not bein' familiar with your handwritin'. The gent looked like you grown up and I savvied who it was and introduced myself."

"Dad!" exclaimed Jimmy, shaken out of the pathetic mood in which he was listening.

"One and the same. And a fine specimen of pure seventeen-dollar-to-the-ounce mineral he is. He and me cottoned to each other right away. Styles was different but we thought a heap along the same lines. Had dinner together. Yes, siree.

You didn't tell me what to say or not to say so I used my own judgment. He was goin' through to the coast, Californyward, and stopped over to see if he could locate you. He needs you, I'm thinkin'. Straight as an arrer and bright-eyed, but not so keen as he was, I'm thinkin'."

Jimmy was stricken with a sudden qualm of homesickness and self-blame.

"Not ill?" he asked.

"Not a bit of it. I told him how you was makin' good. I heard that from the man you sold your kids to. Proud as a stallion, he was. 'He's a good lad,' he says. 'He'll go far. But he'll not go too far from me, I know that. It's the Hollister habit, sir,' he says, 'to want to stand on their own feet. When Jimmy's sure he's firm an' steady, he'll let me know. I'm not goin' to interfere.'"

"Then I tells him I was goin' to pay you a visit an' he gave me a letter to give you. Wouldn't let me give him your address. No, siree. Said you'd answer it if things was right an' thet he'd be in New York in two weeks."

Jimmy took the letter with eyes that were unaffectedly moist.

"I'll write to him. If he needs me I'll go back soon. I've got a lot of good out of this experience. I can sell off the herd. But there's something else keeps me here for a while."

The old goatman nodded and hesitated for a moment before he spoke.

"Don't think me interferin', but me an' your dad got to be real good friends. Yes, siree. An' I'm as old as he is so you mustn't mind my talkin'. I can see how the land lies. Don't let anything I said about Shepherd Dane weigh against his gel. There's good stock springs out of bad an' vicey worser."

"She's a plucky lass an' a true one, I believe. Ef there's anything I can do, say the word an' I'll stay over and help out. Ef you're aimin' to pry her loose from thet crowd you've got a good object but a hard road. I'm due in Durango at a herders' meetin' day after to-morrow but say the word an' I'm with ye. Or wire me there, care of the Hotel Argent till Thursday, after that at Amber Ranch, Pagosa Junction, Archuleta County, an' I'll come a-humpin'."

"Thanks. I'm awfully glad you met dad and you liked each other. I can't say enough about your coming down here. I'm just as proud to be able to call you my friend as dad is."

The old goatman pumped Jimmy's hand fervently.

"Spit an' image of your dad," he said. "Here's hopin' the three of us meet mighty soon. I hate to go but if I don't connect with the night train

I'll be twenty-four hours behind the meetin'. Look out how you tackle that crowd of the Shepherd's."

"I'll go easy," said Jimmy. "And if I need you, I'll wire. But you'll stay overnight."

"Till to-morrow afternoon. Hev you got a gun?"

Jimmy produced his automatic. Amber handled it doubtfully and his voice echoed his actions.

"They say they're fine, but I'll stick to the old cannon."

He produced a heavy calibre Colt and passed it to Jimmy.

"I was goin' to leave this with you. Can you hit anything with that contraption?"

"It's got seven bullets to your six," said Jimmy, "but I'll make a match with you, shot for shot." Amber rose, pistol in hand.

"Done! Flyin' or sot?"

"Either."

"Make it flyin'. I'll show ye a trick or two, young feller, that'll take the conceit out of ye. Dollar a shot? I used to be able to spin a to-matter can once on a time."

"You're on. Tezah!"

The Indian brought a score of new potatoes of even size at Jimmy's request, and stood ready to toss them up at command.

Amber took the first shot and, on the report, gouged the tuber, that fell on the turf. He looked at Jimmy with a grin.

"Not so bad for an old-timer! Go to it, son."

Jimmy threw down his automatic from the shoulder as the potato turned in its arc and brought down his wrist smartly to a quick arrest. The potato rolled along the grass.

"Miss!"

"Pick it up, Tezah," said Jimmy, and exhibited the potato bored cleanly through the middle, the main pulp still unbroken. Amber tugged at his beard as he admitted the hit.

"Dead centre, all right. Question is, would that stop a man ef it didn't happen to bore his vitals?"

He smashed his next target to fragments.

"Like that," he said.

The match ended with four hits for Jimmy and three for Amber who solemnly handed over the dollar. Jimmy flipped it skyward and pulled a swift trigger on the three remaining shells. The first bullet met the descending coin and hurled it high into the air. The third shot caught it just as it hit the ground. Amber shouted as the turf flew.

"By ginger! You got it twice. Durned if you didn't."

He retrieved the dollar, blistered out of shape and heavily nicked on the milling, and gave it back to Jimmy with an air of profound respect.

"Blamed ef I ever saw the like. How in Sam Hill do ye do it? Bill Cody was a joke to you."

It was Jimmy's turn to grin.

"Lots of time and lots of cartridges."

"I'd hate to stand up ag'in ye ef you was shootin' mad. I reckon you can take care of yerself without me. Durn me ef I don't buy one of 'em."

Jimmy privately resolved to send an automatic to Pagoda Junction at the first opportunity. The bout and his success had done him good. The crisp reports seemed somehow to have cleared the air and his brain at the same time.

"You ain't opened your letter yet," said Amber after they had cleaned their guns. "I'll take a look over your herd an' give you a chance."

Jimmy read:

MY DEAR SON:

I knew you'd make good. When you have satisfied yourself with the hard knocks you mentioned in your last letter, come home and take it easier for yourself and make it easier for me.

I'm getting along a bit and Big Business tires me a little at times. It needs a younger hand on my helm

perhaps. There is lots of room in the old home and in my heart for you. Room that will be shared before long I hope by a daughter together with the son of whom I am proud.

Your affectionate father,
JAMES J. HOLLISTER.

The writing looked a bit shaky to Jimmy and a little misty, too.

"God bless him," he said, as he folded up the letter. "I wonder how he and Deborah will get along?"

He put the envelope away and picked up his pipe. He had made up his mind not to let anything stand between the girl and himself.

"I've told her I love her," he argued, "and she didn't say she didn't love me. What's more, I believe she does. If she was once married to me and back in New York, I could make her forget about her scoundrelly relations and her fear of taint. She meant kiddies, of course!"

His face softened as he went out to the corral.

Late that night he sat out on the veranda in the darkness, half the starry horizon blotted out by the hills, the smell of burned brush in the cool night air. Amber and Tezah had gone to bed and Jimmy thrashed over and over the means to accomplish his purpose. He was a little worried over his father's trip to the Pacific Coast in the

fear that some vital business emergency summoned him personally to protect his Western interests, but he dismissed that for the question closer at hand.

"The thing to do," he told himself for the tenth time, "is to run away with her. If I hid in one of the caves in the cañon and found out what that gang is up to I might be able to whip her father into line and even handle Stimpson. But if she found out that I had discovered her father to be a thief or a crook she'd balk. I've got to persuade her to marry me out of hand."

He paced up and down the planks, sucking at his empty pipe for inspiration.

A sudden frenzied blatting of goats checked his cogitation and he leaped from the platform and ran toward the fenced inclosure, gun in hand. In the starlight he could see the herd milling in frantic turmoil, a frenzy of uprearing animals from the midst of which came a hideous snarling.

As he raced up, shouting, a gray shadow broke from the mêlée of fleeces and leaped the four-foot hog-fence as Jimmy fired. The thing collapsed in mid-spring, struck the taut wires hung there an instant, then rolled over to the ground with a thud.

Tezah came hurrying with a lantern, Amber close behind him, gun in hand. Jimmy took the light from the Indian, leaving him to soothe the

goats. The animal he had shot lay in a puddle of blood from a hole in its head. It was a great dog of hybrid hound type with a shaggy coat and great jaws in which the fangs gleamed from the drawn-back gums.

"Kyote?" asked Amber, peering at the dead brute.

"No," said Jimmy, sternly. "I hate to kill a dog that has been trained to do this sort of thing by a pack of cowards. They are trying to drive me out, are they? Fire first and now this. I'll take the carcass over to the Curly O to-morrow and have a reckoning. I was looking for a good excuse."

CHAPTER XI

JIMMY PUTS OVER A BLUFF

WHEN Jimmy Hollister surveyed his charred hills the next morning and saw the body of the great hound beside his goat corral, he stiffened his determination to ride over to the Curly O with the carcass. He was keen to tell the outfit what he thought of them and he wanted to find out if Stimpson had arrived.

Most of all, he hoped for a glimpse of Deborah and the chance of a few words with her. With the advent of Ah Fung, which, to his mind, presaged that of Stimpson, he saw fresh barriers raised.

"If I can get her away," he thought, "or arrange for a meeting, I may be able to override all her objections and persuade her to come to me for once and always."

The Capricorn Ranch was in sad shape. The small amount of unburned acreage was sufficient to last only a few days for the ever-hungry Angoras and after that he would have to depend upon the scanty croppage of the free range. But it had not

been a failure, he felt, as he leaned over the fence and watched the goats grazing contentedly.

He could give it up without the feeling of being a quitter. Deborah and he could be married in Aztec, they could take the train to Denver and change to the transcontinental line. Within a week they would be in New York.

He warmed at the picture, but he sensed the lack of a keystone in the air-castle he was building. Deborah's fear of the taint in her blood had to be overcome and for the life of him he could think of no better way to vanquish it than argument.

"The marrying of a woman by force is easier written of than accomplished," he told himself. "She's got to say 'I will' of her own accord," he reflected, ruefully, walking back to the house where the old goatman stood blinking at the sunrise.

At breakfast he decided to take advice from the kindly common sense of Amber, and he told him some of the difficulties across the remains of the meal. The old goatman listened shrewdly and silently until the end.

"One thing pans out of all that muck," he said when Jimmy stopped, waiting for his opinion. "The girl's clean. She stands the acid. She carried the stuff before she began to suspect anything crooked. Stimpson's talk to her the day you interfered opened her eyes. The fact that she

thinks herself streaked with their base metal shows she's the real article, like gold in refractory ore. Mebbe her scruples is far-fetched, but she's to be honoured for 'em.

"As to the stuff she's been carryin' to Stimpson, I've got a theory on that! 'Parently it was paid for by them clinkin', jinkin' double-eagles you heard at Stimpson's place. Now they wouldn't be buyin' gold with gold. I believe it's cinnabar."

"Cinnabar?"

"Yes, siree. Cinnabar, quicksilver, mercury! The war's sent it up a-scootin' in value. Now there's a heap of good mines closed up for all kinds of reasons—lawyers, estates, manipulation, lack of capital or confidence. I figger they've struck someone else's working, found the cinnabar themselves, mebbe, and they are snakin' out all they can get before someone tumbles to it. That's only a theory but it's fairly sound.

"You've got to get her free from that crowd. It's fairly evident it ain't daughterly affection ties her up so much as it is her scruples keeps her away from you. If Stimpson's showed up they may force her to do somethin' desperate. It's up to you to keep the heart strong in her.

"If she's dead-sure you don't give a dern about what's in her blood and are goin' to be unhappy

ever after ef she turns you down, she'll think twice about it. Bein' a female you'll find sex'll outweigh scruples in the long run. Yes, siree. You work along thet streak an' you'll strike pay dirt yet. Them pateran and barbed-wire idees of yours is first-rate."

He nodded across the table with an air of such benignant wisdom radiating from his homely features that Jimmy's courage flooded to high tide once more. Amber went on.

"I'll go over with ye to the outfit this mornin'. We might give the Shepherd the idee I'm with you permanent. Anyway, two's better than one, and because three's better than two I'd recommend takin' along the Injun. He's a fighter and he's a good watchman. You've got to keep your eyes peeled with thet brand of skunks. There's men put away in these parts quite frequent, and it 'ud be an easy matter for them to plant you in one of them caves in the cañon and none the wiser that your corpse wasn't a mummified Aztec when they found it—ef they ever did.

"Thet breed thinks a lot less of gettin' rid of a man than you did of shooting thet dog last night. Yes, siree. I know 'em. There's just two things 'ud keep 'em from it. Fear of bein' found out and fear of gettin' hurt. We can go over and see how the land lies, ennyway. Ef things look hostile

I'll stick same as I said I would. Has the Injun got a gun?"

"I've a Winchester."

"Good. Give it to him. I'll bet he's opened a breech and peered down a rifle sight many a time."

They had eaten at daybreak, and the land was still orange and purple when they started, Tezah carrying the rifle across the pommel of his saddle in a way that justified Amber's prediction. Jimmy had the carcass of the dog in front of him. The cañon was a rift of violet, with one slowly widening streak of coral along its western rim, as they passed its head.

Close to the line fence Jimmy reined up, dismounted, and picked up an intertwined spray of oak and pine. He showed it to Amber.

"She must have ridden out and dropped this last night after she got back. There was none there when I rode out to Diablo yesterday. She wouldn't have stopped to do it when she rode to help me with the fire. See the acorns? Things are all right so far."

"Meanin' Stimpson ain't showed up, I take it. There's the buttes. Take my advice, son. Don't give them a chance to get the drop on ye. You do the talkin' an' we'll keep a lookout. Ef I seem to spring any dime-novel stuff, play up to me.

"I know some of the kinks in their kind. I ain't lived in the State of Colorado sence '68 without gettin' some acquainted with their tricks. No, siree. You speak your piece. Ef the gel's in earshot mebbe you can tip her off about a meetin'-place."

It was good advice, Jimmy considered. His resentment still ran high, but unless he could get in communication with Deborah, the trip began to seem somewhat of a fool's errand. There was no especial advantage to be gained in telling the Danes, father and son, what they must guess he thought of them.

The ranch house appeared deserted save for the lazy curl of smoke from its chimney as they rode up, three abreast, between the buttes. A dog bayed suddenly and a man appeared on the front porch wiping his mouth with his sleeve. He called back through the open door and Shepherd Dane and his son appeared, with the fourth male inmate of the Curly O behind them.

The Shepherd descended the steps and gave a glance over his shoulder at the upper story where Jimmy fancied he saw the flash of a face quickly withdrawn. Then he advanced to meet them.

Tezah held the gate open and they rode into the yard. The younger Dane came down to join his

father, the other two remaining at the head of the steps.

"You don't seem to appreciate the value of good advice, my young goat-breeder," said the Shepherd. "I told you it wasn't healthy for you on this side of the cañon."

"Then you keep your dogs and Chinese fire-starters off my land," said Jimmy, hotly, "for it isn't healthy for them in that section."

He flung the stark body of the dog at Dane's feet. The Shepherd recoiled.

"I know of no reason why you should dump your carrion here," he said. "The sun seems to have gone to your head with your talk of Chinamen and dogs. I know nothing of it."

"The dog's pardner knows it, Shepherd," broke in Amber.

Somewhere inside the house the bay of the other hound had changed to a howl as if it scented the dead body of its mate. Jimmy saw the men coming down from the veranda.

"We'll finish this talk as we stand," he said. "The Chinaman fired my brush yesterday and I shot the dog harrying my goats. If you think to drive me off my holding by cowardly tricks of that kind, you'll find it as easy to shift Diablo over there. As long as Diablo stays in place you'll find me on my land and able to protect it."

He raised his voice in special emphasis on the word "Diablo," hoping that he might catch the attention of Deborah who he was convinced was listening at the upper window. Meanwhile the elder Dane was giving close scrutiny to the man who had called him "Shepherd."

"Find this country enny more healthy than Denver, Shepherd?" asked Amber. "I understood the climate didn't suit you over-well back there."

Dane's bull-necked son pushed forward.

"Seems to me you're making a hell of a fuss over a dead dog," he said. "You've been warned off this place once, now get off before you get hurt. And take your meat with you."

He turned over the carcass with his foot and bent to look at the hole in its head.

"Nice clean shot, warn't it?" asked Amber, pleasantly. "Purty a shot as I ever seen. One pull in the dark done it as he hopped the fence."

The Shepherd still gazed with puzzled brows at Amber. His son sneered openly.

"It's easy to brag of shooting a dog," he said. "A dog don't pack a gun."

Amber smiled back at him.

"I didn't do it. I ain't jack-high with him when it comes to shootin'!"

Under cover of the talk Jimmy covertly watched

the window. The half-curtain shifted ever so slightly. Deborah had heard him, perhaps had understood, perhaps would come to Diablo.

Amber reached into the pocket of his shirt and took out a deck of cards.

"I'm a Canfield fiend," he said. "Allus carry 'em with me.

"Talkin' of kyards and shootin', I'm willin' to bet thet my pardner here can shoot the pip out of an ace with me holdin' it. It'll spile my solitaire pack, but ef you 'ud like to put up a little wager on it, I'll cover it."

He looked meaningly at Jimmy. This was the dime-novel play he had spoken of. Jimmy could see little rhyme or reason for the move but sat silent in his saddle waiting for light.

"You're a gambler, Shepherd, or you used to be. What do you say? Ef my pardner cleans the ace you'll admit he's able to look after his property and ef you should see a dog or a Chinaman headin' his way you might agree, as your end of the bet, to undertake to dissuade 'em. As for his end of it——"

The Shepherd suddenly showed his teeth through his beard and waved his son aside.

"I ain't interested in fancy shootin'. He can fire his popgun if he wants to. Or I'll take your word for it. All I'm interested in is that he keeps

his nose off my land and out of my business. He don't belong here. He's a long way from home, and the wisest thing for him to do would be to put on his dude clothes and go back East.

"But if you want to make a gambling point of it, I'll take you up. If he wins he stays and I'll advertise his shootin' if that's what you're after—just so long as he stays his side of the cañon. If he loses, he takes the next train for Flatbush, or wherever he comes from. I don't give a whoop one way or the other. I can look after my own interests."

"What do you say to it, Jimmy?"

Amber's eyes slanted ever so slightly toward the window and Jimmy saw that he, too, had noticed the curtain.

To Jimmy the suggestion seemed hazardous and unnecessary. But he had practically made up his mind to give up the burned-out ranch, once he had secured Deborah, and there was steady purpose in Amber's eyes. He felt fairly sure of his shooting though the cards seemed far smaller than he had usually imagined them as he looked at them now in the goatman's hands.

"All right," he said.

"You all play ajuence on the steps," said Amber. "The Injun 'll hold the hosses. Here's an ace. The ace of hearts. Seems to stand to reason thet

ef a man can plug thet he could hit the human organ, which is some bigger as a target."

"Providin' the other man ain't shootin' at the same time."

Amber looked equably at the younger Dane who was scowling at Jimmy, his eyes malevolent.

"I'll put up a good-sized wager on thet, too. You want to remember thet he might be jest as anxious to miss hurtin' me, bein' as I'm his pardner, as he might not be ef someone, not bein' his pardner, was on the receivin' end. Would you mind gettin' back on the steps?"

The Curly O quartet grouped themselves about the Shepherd who said something in answer to the muttered protest of his son that appeared to calm him.

Jimmy and Amber dismounted and Tezah held the reins, his face inscrutable, his rifle still at the carry.

"Five paces," said the goatman. "Thet's jest about a rod the way I step it."

He took up his position, standing firmly but easily, his right hand extended, the card between thumb and forefinger. In Jimmy's eyes it looked hardly bigger than a visiting-card. The curtain stirred again and Deborah's face appeared for a second. Evidently she had seen the men go to the steps and knew that they could not see her. She

gave Jimmy a brief nod of understanding. His nerves relaxed and came back to an even tension, brain and blood in perfect coördination.

He took out his automatic and examined it, taking out the clip and replacing it and forcing back the slide to make sure a cartridge was in the breech. He slipped back the safety catch and stood with his right arm loosely swinging at his side. The hound had stopped howling. Tezah held the horses short-checked, and the men on the steps leaned forward, rigidly intent.

"Ready," said Amber.

There was a flash of blue steel as Jimmy's arm swung upward, flexed at the elbow, down again, to stop dead as the muzzle of his gun spat fire. He seemed to flip the bullet from the barrel. The card twitched in Amber's hand but he still retained it between thumb and finger. He held it to the light, nodded, walked over with it toward the steps, and deftly flicked it at the Shepherd. It soared edgewise and dropped between the latter's feet.

"Plumb taken the heart out of things," he said, meaningly. "You lose, Shepherd."

Dane looked chagrined and sat stroking his beard. Jimmy replaced his pistol in the holster and remounted with Amber. Dane's son suddenly strode forward, his face convulsed with rage.

"You keep your side of the fence," he shouted.

"And out of the cañon, too. You may be a fancy shooter but if I ever come to grips with you, man to man, I'll knock your head off."

There was an animus in his manner that puzzled Jimmy. It was distinct from the hostility displayed by the Shepherd, an air of personal grievance. With it all Jimmy found something to like in the man. He was neither coward nor bully, his aggression was earnest, the challenge direct. Jimmy sat calmly on Solo as he answered:

"Perhaps—and perhaps not. Can you lick Stimpson?"

The other stared.

"What has that got to do with it?"

The wrath in his face gave way to reluctant, unconvinced admiration.

"Did you give Stimpson a beating?" he asked.

"Ask him. Or better, ask your sister. She saw it."

"If you've licked Stimpy, I'll take it all back. Not because I'm afraid of you, and you want to keep clear of our land and out of the cañon. But Stimpy! I'd have given a thousand dollars to see it."

Whatever dislike he held for Jimmy, it was plain that his hatred for Stimpson was far greater. As the trio rode off young Dane waved a hand after them in almost friendly fashion.

"He's got it in for Stimpson," commented Amber. "I've a notion that it's on account of his wantin' to marry his sister. He don't want you to, either, but he sure hates Stimpson."

Jimmy nodded reflectively. It was something deeper than that, he fancied.

"Do you mind telling me just why you pulled off that grand-stand play with the gun?" he asked, presently.

Amber chuckled.

"The Shepherd's a gambler. So am I. You've played poker, I reckon. Me, too, a heap. And other games. Forty year ago I used to go kitin' down to Denver whenever I made a strike, buy me a new pair of overalls, a side of bacon, and some blasting-powder and then breeze into the Nickel Plate and feed my money across the faro layout or over the wheel. The Shepherd was a dealer in them days. He was too crooked for the men that ran the games and he left Denver for the best part of twenty years.

"Now you and me threw a bluff into the Shepherd and his crowd, the kind of a bluff that wins big pots oftener than good kyards, a bluff backed by the fact thet the man behind it is willin' to go the limit. I ain't talkin' about table-stake games. You've got to have the roll behind the bluff. Your roll was your gun play.

They know you can shoot an' it's goin' to make 'em careful.

"The Shepherd never bluffed. He always hid cards in a hold-out or the deck was marked. I figger you've gained your ends. You got word through to the gel, and they're goin' to leave you alone for a while."

"I see," said Jimmy. "At that I can't believe Dane played to lose. I've got a hunch that they are going to make a final haul from the cañon and clear out. He was too willing to take the bet. But, as you say, I've got a breathing-spell and the chance to talk with Deborah. You've helped me wonderfully."

"There's another thing. They don't go in to Aztec often. You'll notice I spoke of you as my pardner. They'll figger I'm with you right along. Three to four is too close odds for them. Ef you like I'll stay."

"No, thanks. I think I can handle it alone. I'm going to try and persuade her to run away with me."

"Bully for you. Come an' stay with me. Unless you're aimin' to go East. Do you need any money?"

He lugged out a fat wallet.

"Call it a loan or I'll buy your herd from you for spot cash and call for 'em later. The Injun

can watch 'em till I come. How much do you want?"

Jimmy looked at him affectionately.

"I've got enough. I've got more to thank you for than I know how to express. I wish I had been your partner back in the days you talk of."

"Do you, now? I take that as mighty good of you, son. Yes, siree. And I'd hev been glad to hev had ye."

He beamed on Jimmy with unaffected delight.

"I'll take a bite to eat and ride on to Aztec afterward. Don't forget to wire me. Hotel Argent, Durango, or Pagosa. They'll phone it on to the ranch from the junction. You'll have to let me know how you make out, ennyway."

Jimmy saw the generous Westerner depart with genuine regret and then prepared himself for action. He purposed riding over to Diablo in the afternoon though he did not much expect that Deborah would get the chance to meet him. The wireophone at sunset was what he staked his prospects of success upon.

CHAPTER XII

THE WIREPHONE

THERE was no sign of Deborah on Diablo. Jimmy consoled himself for the disappointment.

Probably she could not get away from the house for that long, if they'd let her leave at all, he persuaded himself as he rode back to Capricorn Lodge, going close to the gate of the Curly O line fence with the vague hope of finding a pateran. He saw the fresh tracks of several horses, but no sign of Deborah's passing.

"They're in the cañon, making their clean-up," he thought. "I'm pretty certain they're ready for a shift. The Shepherd was altogether too amiable. Deborah's shut up while they are away from the ranch house. I wonder if I'd dare ride over there on the chance that they've left no one on guard. It's hardly likely. And there's the other dog."

He dismounted and tried to determine how many had passed. The fresh tracks all led one way. They were still in the cañon, but there was no telling how soon they would come out. The sun was

already sinking toward the western hills. He gave up trying the medley of hoof-marks.

"Tezah might have done it," he thought, "but I am still too much of a tenderfoot for that. I may meet them coming out."

As he neared the head of the cañon he saw dust rising at the top of the trail. Then he recognized the burly figure of the younger Dane. Four horses with pack-saddles followed between him and two more riders. The Shepherd did not appear.

"Stayed home to guard Deborah," muttered Jimmy. "Stimpson may have shown up."

He did not change Solo's course, which would bring him close to the little cavalcade. He had a fancy to inspect the pack-animals at close range.

The Curly O men rode steadily toward him. The two who brought up the rear chatted amicably, and Deborah's brother did not appear at all disturbed at the sight of Jimmy.

"They are going to clear out, Solo," said the latter. "It's a hunch and a good one. But they won't go until morning, I fancy, and we've got the night before us. Wait till the wire starts working."

By this time Dane and his equipment were less than fifty yards away. Jimmy, ready to draw his automatic, rode warily on to meet them.

Dane passed him within ten feet. He vouch-

safed no greeting but kept his eyes fixed on Jimmy.

"Thinks he's going to get rid of me."

Jimmy suddenly stiffened in his saddle. He had seen something in the leather band about Dane's sombrero that made him catch his breath. It was a spray of twisted oak and pine and the acorns were gone from the pale green chalices.

Jimmy saw a look of self-complacency melt the sterner rigour of Dane's regard, an answer to the riddle he was asking himself. He held behind a mask the smile that he was tempted to display.

Deborah must have put the pateran in her brother's hatband. As for his fatuous smile, that was a matter that Jimmy set aside for the moment. Perhaps Dane had found other paterans and guessed something of their significance. But this one meant that there was trouble at the Curly O and that she had taken the chance of Jimmy's meeting her brother on the ride she knew the former would take to Diablo.

In an hour, when the sun set, he would know the rest. He felt almost friendly toward Dane and the latter seemed affected by the look in Jimmy's face. He grinned.

"Broke his ribs, eh? And spoiled his looks. She told me about it."

The pack-horses passed by. Each bore four

boxes of stout wood, heavily roped, about two feet long and a third of that in other measurements.

"Mercury or gold," thought Jimmy. "There is a tidy little sum in that load."

Dane clucked to his horse and joined his companions behind the pack-animals. Jimmy rode on toward the Capricorn Ranch for twenty minutes, then guided Solo to a tiny water-hole aside from the trail. Beside this discovery that he had made long ago while exploring the country, he swallowed a quick meal of cold meat and biscuits he had taken the forethought to bring with him, watered Solo, and let him graze until the rim of the sun almost touched the top of Diablo's chimney.

As he rode back toward the Curly O fence he saw a distant dust cloud nearing the two buttes that hid the Curly O ranch house. Now Deborah would be planning to steal away and tap out the message.

Solo cropped at the scanty grass while Jimmy sat beside the fence smoking, listening for the first vibration of the wire. The sun sank with intolerable slowness, it seemed to him, and then, suddenly, it was gone. The eastern sky was aflame with the afterglow, and he watched it fade to purple, to green, to olive. A star or two peeped out and the last hint of shadows vanished. It was night and there was no word from Deborah.

Jimmy gripped his courage hard and flung off

the whisper of failure that seemed to enter his ears on the light breeze. A sturdy something told him to wait, until midnight if necessary, but to wait, that Deborah was trying to tell him to have patience. It was an anxious vigil, but he held it, chafing at inaction, steadying his nerves against the time he would have to call upon them.

Deborah in danger! The thought of her peril thrilled him, possessed him with the belief that she needed him and that through this service he would reach the prize, the guerdon of her surrender.

The locusts scraped their wing fiddles. Solo whinnied and he whistled him closer. A hound bayed, far off, in the direction of the ranch house.

Jimmy's thoughts went gipsying, up-borne by optimism. He saw Deborah ensconced in New York, winning the father's heart as she had the son's. He saw. . . .

It came at last. A clangy yet distinct vibration. Then a series of short clicks and long clashes in the International Code, tapped out without punctuation, as if the sender was pressed for time.

Click—clash—clash—clash. Click—click—click—click—thrice repeated. "J. H." The initials of his name.

Jimmy answered.

Clash—clash—click. Click—clash! in the abbreviation of "G. A.—Go ahead!"

He settled down to listen, his brain automatically interpreting the sounds, his brows knitting in the darkness, and his jaw thrusting out to match the set of his shoulders.

...s h . e . — . r . e

"S here." That meant Stimpson.

—t . — . r — — — o . . — u — . . . b . — . . l . e —t . — . r
— . — — y . . i — . n — — . g . . — . f — — — o . — . r — . — c
. e — — m . e — — m . — a . — . r . — . r — . — — y h . . i
— — m

Jimmy gritted his teeth as he forced himself to listen. Trying to force her to marry Stimpson, were they? There was a break in the sending. Then it started again faintly, as if Deborah feared being overheard in a pitiful plea for help.

. . i . — a — — m . — a . . — . f . — . r . — a . . i — . . d
— — . — q — . — k — . n — — m — . . d

The last four symbols stood for "Quick! No more." And the "D" for "Deborah!"

With one hand on the horn of his saddle, the other in Solo's mane, Jimmy vaulted into his seat and galloped through the sage, the message spurring him to action.

"I am afraid. Quick!"

The soft thud of Solo's hoofs repeated it as a chorus to the swift plans that resolved themselves in his brain and were quickly discarded. There were five men in the ranch house now, perhaps six if Ah Fung had come with Stimpson, as seemed likely. He must trust to luck.

One thing lay in his favour. They would not be expecting him. Deborah would, and she would be willing to go with him. Solo could carry two if Jimmy could set her free without arousing the rest.

A black shape came bounding through the clumps of sage and sprang at his stirrup with a growl. The other dog had been let loose to guard the ranch.

Solo plunged as the hound, foiled in its leap, snarled and snapped at his fetlocks. A side jump showed Jimmy the light of the ranch house between the buttes, which he had not seen in the darkness. The dog had to be got rid of and he was too close to the house to risk a shot. Solo, uncontrollable for the moment, was tearing toward the buttes, the brute leaping beside them with slaver-jaws. Jimmy felt for his knife, a serviceable weapon with a long, stout blade, and opened it.

His polo days, when he had leaned far forward and down to smash the ball beneath his pony's neck, came to his aid. Sinking his knees into

Solo's withers, he leaned away down and grabbed for the loose hide of the hound's neck. His fingers clutched a heavy leather collar and, with a sudden output of energy, he heaved the brute clear of the ground and up, clawing at the frantic Solo, snapping its jaws as it tried to twist on Jimmy's viselike grasp, up till the forepaws scraped on the pommel of the saddle.

He drew his knife blade swiftly across the hound's throat as it threw up its head. The blood spurted thickly and he flung the twitching body into the sage, closed his knife, and took both hands to subdue the almost crazy Solo.

"Poor devil," he said. "Doing your duty as you saw it. Well, your blood is on their heads. And all over me," he added. "If Deborah sees me suddenly in the light she'll think I've been murdered!"

Solo, soothed at last, he tethered to a low, tough branch of mesquite close by the butte.

"Don't whinny, old boy."

The pony thrust its soft muzzle into his hand and looked after him with head erect as Jimmy, trying to wipe off some of the blood with herbage, stole between the sandstone pillars toward the ranch house, keeping away from the front where the lights showed, and circling the enclosure, wriggling along at last flat to the earth, snakewise.

So he crawled under the bottom strand of the fence and up to the side of the house. The window at which he had seen Deborah on his last visit was above the veranda. It had no other opening to the outside. He would have to attract her attention from the front, light or no light.

Jimmy crawled around foot by foot. He was close to the steps when the door opened and a bar of light streamed down them. He shrank back into the angle of the steps and the veranda and crouched there, hoping he had not been heard.

Feet moved above him and chairs were dragged forward. Unless he made the circuit of the house he could not get beneath Deborah's window nor, with the men outside, could he attempt to communicate with her.

"After all, it's our affair."

That's Stimpson, thought Jimmy.

A match scratched and the voice went on.

"If they don't like it, they can lump it. We're the brains of this thing and I don't intend to waste time arguing with a couple of ivory heads. You got my letter? It's straight. The jig's up in Colorado. They are on to us. We've got to get out and do it damn quick. More'n that, we've got to split up in case they get on our trail. This last lot is the wind-up, but we'll have to get rid of it outside the state. Beat that into the heads

of those dummies inside, will you? Is the outfit stowed away safe?"

"They'll never find that." Jimmy recognized the voice of the younger Dane. "It's in the big cave where we've done the work, buried six feet in the sand. There's picture writing all over the walls. There's one of an Indian shooting arrows into three buffalo. The outfit's under that. No one would find it even if they got into the cave, and the entrance to that is only a slit in the face of the rock, not a regular cave opening at all."

As his son ceased the Shepherd laughed and took up the conversation.

"So the jig's up, is it, Stimpson? Well, we've made hay while the sun shone. And I'm used to moving on. I and Ben here and Deborah, we're fond of travelling when we can afford to travel right."

"Ah!"

There was a grating undertone in the exclamation with which Stimpson capped the speech of the Shepherd that made Jimmy inch up his head toward the veranda floor. It held the first serious grind of steel on steel as swordsmen engage in earnest after the preliminary salute.

"That's another matter to be settled," said Stimpson. "I mean about Deborah. I've stood all the nonsense I'm going to. You've stalled

me long enough, Shepherd. You got me in wrong with the girl by not telling her she had to marry me before she came to my place the last time."

"The time young Hollister broke your ribs for you?"

Jimmy sensed the deliberate taunt in young Dane's thrust. Matters were culminating fast. "If they get to quarrelling," he told himself, "they're playing on my side."

"If he said so, he lies," retorted Stimpson. "That's aside from the point. I want Deborah, and I'm going to have her."

"The hell you are!"

"Go easy, son. See here, Stimp, you can't force the girl to marry you."

"Oh, can't I? Leave that to me. She's going with me, that's flat. You're her father and you've given me your permission or your blessing, whichever you like to call it. That ought to be good enough for her."

"Well, it ain't good enough for me."

Jimmy hugged himself at the truculent note in young Dane's voice.

"What in blazes have you got to do with it?"

"A heap." Jimmy heard the scrape of the chairs as the men rose and faced each other. "See here, dad, I'm sick of your shilly-shallying. You

can't double-cross me. It's time Deborah knew, anyhow, and I'm going to tell her."

"Tell her what?"

"Several things, Stimpy. The most important is that I'm going to marry her myself!"

Jimmy gasped in unison with Stimpson's astonished growl.

"Are you crazy?"

"She's no more my sister than she is his daughter. Never mind the dope on that. It's straight. She was left in dad's charge when she was a kid, after her own father died. That's enough for you to know."

Jimmy's heart leaped. The barriers were down. Deborah need no longer be haunted by the taint of Dane's ill-bred blood. Above him the three voices blended, Stimpson's blustering, the Shepherd's pleading, and his son's defiant. Then came the panting sounds of a struggle and the creak of the railing as Stimpson and young Dane smashed into it. Jimmy clutched his pistol for action.

A chairback splintered with a crash. A shot roared out and Jimmy saw Stimpson staggering backward down the steps, his legs giving under him halfway down so that he rolled heavily to the ground and lay still, face upward to the stars.

The door burst open with a babble of excited

voices, high over which sounded the hysterical squeal of the Shepherd.

"You've killed him, Ben. My God! You've killed him!"

"Serves him right. He tried to brain me with that chair, damn him! No use crying over it, dad. You're getting soft in your old age. Get a lantern, Jerry, we'll have to bury him. Where's that Chink of his?"

"In the kitchen."

Jimmy darted around the house and crashed into a stand holding empty milk-pails. They clattered noisily to the ground and he heard the rush of feet toward the side railing.

Swearing softly at himself for his clumsiness, he ran around back of the house. A door swung open. Ah Fung appeared, holding a lantern above his head. Jimmy fired and smashed the glass, running zigzag for the fence. The barbed wire held him and he tore free, ripping shirt and skin together, while a fusillade of shots followed. A bullet thudded into the ground by his foot, another sang by his head.

Once he turned to fire at a man who came through the gate and ran shouting to cut him off, shooting at random into the night.

"I've got him, Shepherd," the man cried. "This way, Ben."

Jimmy fired, and the boaster dropped with a groan as Jimmy sped on, jumping the sage clumps while shot after shot sent missiles hurrying in his direction. He came down from a jump with one foot in a prairie-dog hole, tripped, and fell heavily.

"There he is, boys," he heard young Dane call out. "We've hit him."

The fall had sent Jimmy's pistol flying and he groped for it, praying that the soft dirt had not fouled the mechanism. Two lanterns were dancing swiftly through the sage as their bearers ran at top speed toward him. They had ceased firing, thinking him killed from his inaction.

The first lantern stopped not ten paces away and the other joined it.

"Somewhere 'round here," said Dane. "Go careful, Jerry, he may sting yet. Hold that lantern higher, Ah Fung. If he's alive you can get even with him for shooting your boss."

Jimmy appreciated the shrewdness of that move even as he realized the jeopardy in which it placed him. It at once kept Ah Fung from informing on them and retained him on their side. Doubtless all hands would join in to save their own necks and swear that Jimmy had fired the shot that killed Stimpson.

"They won't have to worry about that," he thought, as he searched in vain for his weapon.

In a few seconds it would all be over. Deborah had depended on him, and all his brave determination had ended in disaster through his own clumsiness.

In desperation he thrust his hand into the sage clump that shielded him as yet from the lanterns. His fingers found the muzzle of his gun that had fallen butt downward into the centre of the tough-stemmed bush.

The crack of his two shots was followed by the crash of the lanterns. One light went out and the other flame faltered. Young Dane cursed and three bullets whipped through the sage clump, but failed to hit Jimmy, who, bent double, was making top speed toward the buttes. A light flared up behind him.

Someone had soaked a sage bush with kerosene and turned it into a high-flaming torch. Fortunately, it seemed rather to dazzle than help the pursuers; and Jimmy, straightening up, sprinted for Solo. He untied the rope swiftly and sprang to the saddle. Solo's hoofs drummed over the ground, his back steady as a table-top, his legs outstretched to the limit of their speed.

CHAPTER XIII

INTO THE CAÑON

JIMMY reached the gate in the Curly O fence and held the fretting Solo to a standstill while he listened. For the first few seconds he heard nothing; then the sound that he expected manifested itself, the rhythmic fall of horses' feet.

They were after him, with no intention of letting him get clear. There was no other angle to look at it, Jimmy decided. Stimpson had said that the authorities were already alive to whatever breach of the law they had been engaged in. To allow Jimmy to carry the news of murder would mean, however they might try to shift the blame on him, an arrest that would ultimately land them in the net.

And Deborah was waiting for him. No danger from Stimpson now, but a graver one from young Dane. They might even be able to persuade her, thought Jimmy, that he had shot Stimpson. At all hazards her rescue must be accomplished before morning.

As he swung up toward his own holding Jimmy

wished with all his heart that Amber had stayed over. The goatman would have been a stalwart ally. But Tezah was a good man, if ancient, and it was to secure this reinforcement that he returned to Capricorn Lodge.

He tried to place himself in the position of the Danes. Stimpson was dead and Jimmy was fairly sure that he had badly wounded the man he had hit. That left one man besides the Shepherd, his son, and Ah Fung. Four against two.

They would make every effort to get rid of him. That would bring them away from the ranch house. But Stimpson's body had to be disposed of and someone would remain to guard the girl and get ready for departure.

Jimmy's reasoning sifted down to the hope that by eluding the pursuit he might double back to the Curly O ranch house and, with Tezah, dispose of whoever was there, rescue Deborah, and make for Aztec.

He had gained on them; he was certain of that. Solo was fast, and he had in Jimmy a rider compared to whom the men of the Curly O were meal sacks. But how to double on them successfully and split their forces was the immediate question that worried Jimmy. Two to two, he was not afraid of the issue.

He would give no alarm this time. And

Deborah—Deborah was waiting in what agony of mind he could well guess after the first shot, the fusillade, and the dying sounds of the pursuit.

The light shone from Capricorn Lodge as he passed the goats in their ten-acre fence lot and jumped from the saddle before Solo had slid to a standstill. There was not much time, but there was little to do.

"I've got to prevent them bottling me up here," thought Jimmy, "or they'll hold me till morning and have a sheriff up here on some yarn they'll fix up so that I'll be held while they get away with Deborah. Where the devil is Tezah?"

He ran quickly through the rooms after he had slipped all his money into his pocket for emergencies and loaded himself with cartridges after refilling the clip of the automatic. The Indian was gone and the Winchester was gone with him. Jimmy knew that he was not with the goats.

"The one time I really needed him," he told himself.

The sound of a shot came faintly, too heavy for a revolver. Then another and another. Jimmy put out the lamp.

"They've found Tezah," he muttered.

"Either he fired all three of those shots or they got rifles when they went back for their horses."

He went silently out on the veranda and stood

by Solo, who was gazing toward the cañon, his ears high pricked.

The thunder of a horse ridden at a desperate speed broke the silence, coming nearer and nearer. Jimmy saw a vague blot turn the corner of the corral, racing for the house.

He straightened up with relief. His enemies would not come in that fashion. It was Tezah.

The Indian hauled his panting pony to its haunches and slid off, rifle in hand, as Jimmy softly hailed him. He was naked save for a breech clout in which was thrust a knife, and a cartridge belt slung across his shoulder. He came up to Jimmy as lightly as a cat, his eyes gleaming in the starlight.

"Three men coming, señor. They fired at me twice and I shot back. All missed. We were riding hard. Let us go into the house; they are close behind. Listen!"

Once more Jimmy heard the ominous thud of hoofs.

"Three of them? Then the Shepherd's along, and Ah Fung and the man I hit are with the girl. We've got to get across the cañon without their seeing us, Tezah."

The Indian nodded.

"The girl?"

"Yes. There's no time to lose. Come on!"

"There is a short cut, señor. We can cross the

cañon. But we cannot take the horses, and it is dangerous in the dark."

"Come on."

A moment later and they were stealing through the sage. Tezah seemed to have recovered his youth in action; and Jimmy, eager as he was, was hard put to it to keep up with the old chief. On the brink of the cañon the Indian cast about like a dog on a lost scent while Jimmy fought his impatience. The hoofbeats were no longer audible.

"Surrounding the house, I hope," thought Jimmy. "They'll see the ponies and think we're inside."

"Found it, Tezah?"

The Indian had come up to him noiselessly and almost unseen.

"Yes, señor. I will go first. Let your foot always follow my hand. Carry the rifle and pass it to me as I ask."

Later, when Jimmy surveyed the cliff in daylight, he could not make out the track, if track it could be called, down which Tezah led him, placing his feet, giving him minute instructions for every projection and cavity.

Twice Jimmy, passing down the rifle, hung by his fingertips to a narrow ledge and let himself drop through the blackness. Once Tezah saved him as he swayed, holding him back against the wall with a thin arm that seemed made of steel. After that

slip they rested for a moment, weak from lack of breath and the narrow escape.

"I heard a coyote, señor," whispered Tezah. "So I rode out with my rifle and, between two hills, I almost met the three men. I did not hear you."

"I took a short cut. We must get the girl, Tezah, and some horses. We could never get her up this way——"

"No, señor. One may climb down, but not up on this side."

"The man who fired the brush is at the ranch house, the yellow-faced Chinaman. And another that I wounded."

"Yes, señor. It should be easy. Are you ready?"

Once, as Jimmy looked up, he saw a thin strip of sky glittering with stars above the wedge of the cañon. They climbed through blackness, and it seemed an age before they reached the bottom and hurried across the boulder-strewn space. The up-climb was harder but less hazardous.

Halfway to the top they struck a mountaineer's chimney, a deep groove in the rock, up which they thrust themselves by their knees and elbows, emerging at last on the verge of the precipice within fifty feet of the fence, passed through the wires, and struck out at a dog trot across country

for the ranch house, which, Tezah declared, was in a straight line with the route they had taken.

At the buttes they halted.

"We want to locate those horses, Tezah, though we can't spare much time. No telling how soon they'll find out we're not in the house. They may be on the way back now."

"No, señor. They are not yet on this side of the cañon. I heard some shots on the other side as we came."

Jimmy did not doubt Tezah's authoritative statement.

"They must have been firing through the walls. That means they will soon know we are not there. Where the devil have they put those horses? There were four of them they used for pack-animals."

The barn doors were open and the place empty. So was the corral and the inclosure.

"Grazing out," said Jimmy. "Heaven knows where! Confound it! We can't walk to Aztec. It's no use wasting time, Tezah. Let's go to the house."

They spoke in whispers. Jimmy's spirit was sore at the way luck was breaking against them. First the milk-pails, and now the horses, he thought, bitterly. "But we'll jam through somehow," he determined.

One window in the rear showed a light next to the door where Ah Fung had appeared with the lantern in his hand.

"That's the kitchen," said Jimmy. "See if the Chinaman's there, Tezah. You can go more quickly than I can."

The Indian had melted into the night before the sentence was finished. He reappeared before Jimmy thought he had reached the house.

"The yellow-face sits at the table, señor," he reported. "He has a gun beside him and an ax. Also he listens and is afraid. I made no noises, but he thinks he hears many. If the señor wishes I will take care of the yellow-face."

He spoke contemptuously. Jimmy reflected. The wounded man was yet to be accounted for, and he could only signal to Deborah's window from the front.

"All right. Go back to the window. If you hear a shot or a struggle, see that he does not get to the front of the house."

They were outside the wires of the enclosure. Jimmy stole cautiously around to the front where all was dark. He saw nothing of the man and opened the gate silently, tiptoeing up the hard-trodden dirt of the path. Something lay across it like a log.

At first Jimmy thought it was Stimpson, but

the man's face was beardless, as it showed gray and still in the darkness.

"Dead," thought Jimmy.

The idea of having killed a man awed him even in his emergency, and he knelt by the body and felt for a heartbeat. The shirt was sticky with blood, though the hemorrhage had stopped. The man had been shot through the shoulder. His pulses were low but steady, and Jimmy felt relieved at the slow, persistent throb.

"Glad I didn't kill him," he thought. "What am I going to do with him? If I shift him he may start bleeding."

He remembered seeing a canvas hammock on the porch when he had ridden up with Amber. There had been a blanket on it. For a moment he swung between the horns of a dilemma. Then humanity conquered. He tiptoed to the veranda and up the steps, released the hammock from the hooks, made it into a bundle, and went back to the man.

He fashioned a pillow from the canvas and slipped it under the limp neck and spread the blanket across the body. The man moaned slightly but did not regain consciousness.

"Couldn't leave him like that," Jimmy told himself. "If he caught cold in the wound I gave him it would be practically murder. He's out of

the fighting, anyway. Maybe I'm a fool, but I can't help it. Now for Deborah. We'll get Ah Fung between the two of us if the door's open."

The main entrance had been left unlocked in the flurry of the pursuit, and Jimmy found himself in a narrow passage. Along this he groped with extended hands, finding doors to right and left and bringing up against one at the end. As he lightly fingered the latch he heard the noise of a shifting chair, followed by the opening of a door. Ah Fung's voice sounded in a startled "Who that?"

Jimmy heard a quick rush of padded feet, a stifled "Hi yah!" from the Chinaman, and the noise of a fall as he threw open the door of the kitchen. Ah Fung was on the floor, his ax beside him, Tezah scated on his chest, pinning down Ah Fung's arms with his knees while he flourished a knife before the Oriental's putty-coloured features.

"You spik, I keel," he said in broken English, his old eyes flaring crimson in the lamplight.

Ah Fung, gazing at the demoniac countenance of the Indian, seemed paralyzed with fear. Jimmy swiftly crossed the room; and, between them, they trussed him so that he could not move, and set him up in a corner.

"Where's the girl?" snapped Jimmy.

"Topside!" Ah Fung rolled his eyes upward.

"Where are the horses?"

"*No sabe. No sabe*, me tellee you," he almost screamed as Tezah, understanding his mongrel frontier Spanish, threatened him with the knife. "Suppose I *sabe*, I tell?" he said, sullenly. "You think I damn fool?"

"Stimpson had a horse. You came with him."
Ah Fung shook his head.

"We come in automobileel. It go back. Come again to-morrow."

Tezah gave an exclamation. The moon had risen and its beams were streaming in through the window.

The satellite was at the full. By its light their escape, without horses, would be made more difficult. Jimmy caught up a dishtowel and effectively gagged the Chinaman, laying him, with Tezah's help, on the floor. He took the lamp and sought the staircase. A door to his left opened on it and he leaped up the stairs.

The door of the room was locked, as he had expected, but he burst the lock with his shoulder, setting down the lamp on the floor and bracing his feet against the opposite wall.

Deborah was lying on the bed fully dressed. Raising the lamp, Jimmy saw that she was bound and gagged as securely as Ah Fung downstairs. But her eyes smiled bravely into his.

She tottered as she stood on her feet, and Jimmy caught her in his arms.

"I'll be all right in a minute," she said. "My feet are numb. They bound me just before they started after you. How did you escape them? I thought they had killed you."

Jimmy smiled at her.

"Not yet. But we've got to get out of this. Do you know where they keep the pack-horses?"

"Something frightened them and they stampeded, I heard Jerry say. They didn't go after them because they are all going away to-morrow in a motor car."

Jimmy swallowed something he did not care to have her hear.

"The moon's up. They'll be watching the road to Aztec on this side. It's four hours' ride. Take us ten to walk. And my ponies are at the ranch."

He preceded her downstairs and explained the situation to Tezah.

"We must go down into the cañon, señor," said the Indian. "We can hide in the caves if they come. If they do not see us, to-morrow I can go and get horses and help. I can pass like the lizard."

"Down the way we came? Deborah can never make it."

"With a rope, señor. I saw some in the barn. And the moon will help."

Only the rim of the chasm was silvered with the moonlight, but it served to lower Deborah safely down the chute. Halfway the darkness swallowed her up. With the rope fastened about a great boulder Jimmy descended next and found Deborah safely on a ledge.

"The rest is fairly easy," he said. "Here comes Tezah."

They watched the Indian slide down the illuminated patch. Just as he reached the shadow a shot rang out across the cañon and a bullet flattened close to his head.

"Two of them, señor," he said. "They will ride to the head of the cañon. We must hurry or they will be waiting for us at the bottom."

CHAPTER XIV

THE CLIFF DWELLING

THE absence of the third man, Jimmy reasoned, as they felt their way down the cliff, Tezah leading, Deborah between them, meant that one of their pursuers was scouting along the cañon edge. Now that they had been seen, the lower cañon would be guarded. Probably the man would ride along the rim until he could descend the easier slopes farther down while his fellows made for the trail at the head of the ravine.

Then they would ride toward each other seeking for the fugitives. He contemplated and discussed the idea of a sortie. Dawn was not far off. He had noticed the clock in the Curly O kitchen after they had secured Ah Fung. It was then close to three o'clock. It would be nearly four before they arrived at the bottom. Deborah bravely surrendered herself to their guidance, but progress was slow, goaded as they were by the thought of the riders hastening to intercept them.

Tezah's solution was the only available one,

to hide in some cave and hold them off. Even then, despite the Indian's promise to "pass like a lizard," Jimmy felt that affairs were desperate. They were without food, and soon they would be without water, while their besiegers could supply themselves at will.

The descent was made in silence save for the unavoidable noise of their footsteps. Once in a while a stone would shift or a fragment of weather-rotted rock break off and go clattering to the floor of the cañon, a guide to their foes, if they were near enough.

Deborah's fingers grasped Jimmy's with a confiding pressure as he helped to lower her from ledges that Tezah's eyes seemed to find catwise in the blackness. Jimmy fervently blessed the day that he had rescued the Indian. Without him they could have done nothing but attempt to escape on foot and undoubtedly have been overtaken. The good news he held for her could wait. It seemed almost petty in the face of their present peril.

Turquoise Cañon was, to all intents and purposes, as remote from civilization as if it had been in the middle of a desert. Any help that Tezah might bring would take hours, while Deborah lacked water, and they held off the Danes. His brief experience in the cañon had given him knowl-

edge of the oven-like heat that would penetrate even the caves.

"S-s-t!"

Jimmy, standing beside Deborah, both spread-eagled against the cliff, strained his hearing to catch Tezah's low words.

"They are in the cañon, señor. And here is a bad place. Let me have your belt and handkerchief."

While Jimmy cautiously fumbled to release the articles, holding on with one hand, he tried to distinguish in vain the sounds that the Indian's desert-trained senses had caught. It was getting lighter very slowly, but the stars were losing their brightness and the vague edges of the cliffs were beginning to assume distinct formation.

He dared not look down, but all about him the blackness was gradually changing. Deborah's white waist, invisible a few seconds ago, was now a dull gray.

"Hurry, señor. They are coming!"

He felt the Indian's hand close to his foot; and, stooping at the risk of losing his balance, lowered his belt and the stout bandana handkerchief he had worn about his neck. Tezah found them and Jimmy let go of them at the tug.

They had come to a sheer drop of almost smooth rock. Jimmy remembered that Tezah had ne-

gotiated it on the way up by climbing on his shoulders to a ledge, from which he had given him an arm. On this ledge the Indian was now standing.

"The señorita's foot."

Tezah's voice held an anxious plea for speed. Jimmy sank his fingers, already raw, far into a crevice.

"I'm set, Deborah," he whispered. "Clamber round me and grip my legs as you lower yourself."

He felt her arms about him as she maneuvered herself in position and heard Tezah's low call of "*Bueno*," as the girl's foot found his guiding hand. In turn he found the ledge.

"The señor is taller," said the Indian. "I will let you down, and the señorita can rest upon your shoulders. We are close to the bottom."

The leather of the belt creaked as Jimmy swung to it. The darkness was rapidly dissolving. He could see Tezah's body, braced asquat on the ledge, his feet against a jutting rock, the handkerchief wound about his hands, his eyes full in their sockets from the strain. He felt with his feet for a hold. His toes found something solid, but as he tried to rest his weight it gave way and went bounding down the incline, striking with a noisy, shattering impact on a boulder at the bottom, the sound echoing up and down the cañon.

A shout came from near at hand. A flash of fire spurted in the darkness. Jimmy heard the sullen spat of the lead on the rock beside him. Then he found solid rock.

As he stood, waiting for Deborah, his arms outstretched, his hands groping for her feet, face to the rock, another bullet sped whistling behind him, followed by the sharp clatter of hoofs on the stones of the dry watercourse.

Deborah's shoes touched his shoulders and he felt the warmth of her supple body gliding down his own and, for a moment, her arms clinging about his neck. Tezah followed nimbly and they slid and scrambled down the last few feet of the descent.

The stars were almost out and the strip of sky, dark olive, with one tiny cloud to herald the imminent sunrise. Twenty yards away two horsemen were spurring through the dusk. On one of them the Shepherd's white beard showed behind his pony's neck. Jimmy had put his automatic in his hip pocket while they used the belt. Tezah had the rifle. A shot roared and he fumbled for his gun. It had caught in the lining.

"Quick, señor, this way!" called Tezah.

He caught Deborah's hand and started after the Indian, dodging between the great boulders fallen from the cliff. Tezah turned aside and sped up a

narrow trail to where the crumbling walls of a cliff dwelling nestled eyrie fashion in a cavity of the rock.

Deborah's strength was failing and Jimmy thrust her before him up the incline with his hands about her hips. Bullets spattered fragments of dirt and rock about them, but they gained the ledge and darted behind the tumble-down wall of stones and entered a musty chamber, loopholed to the cañon, roofless save for the overhanging ledge several feet above the top of the wall.

Deborah sank exhausted on the dusty floor as Jimmy swung to the loophole and fired. His heart was pumping furiously from the last burst and his shot went high, while the Shepherd and his son rode unscathed behind a mass of rock that completely hid them and their horses. Presently a rifle barrel showed between a crevice and a bullet fairly entered the loophole, glancing from a flinty stone and ricocheting into the chamber.

Jimmy heard an exclamation and turned in the sharp fear that Deborah was wounded.

"It is nothing, señor."

The tangented missile had struck Tezah in the calf of the leg and he was stoically examining the wound, which bled freely. Jimmy tossed him his handkerchief and he bound it up. Another bullet pinged against the side of the outlet and left a

smear of lead plainly distinguishable in the light that was rapidly increasing to full day.

"Get into the inner room, Deborah!" he commanded.

She looked mutinous, but obeyed, steadying herself with her arm as she went through the low doorway into the chamber built against the solid rock.

Jimmy made a swift examination of their little fortress. It consisted of three rooms built so as to utilize the living rock of the wedge-shaped cavity for side and back walls. A partition of piled-up stones separated the two front rooms from the one to which Deborah had retreated. This reached up to the overhanging ledge.

Probably, he thought, the outer walls had once done the same, but now they were broken of line, making an irregular rampart above which was a gap, jagged at the bottom, smooth where the firm rock sloped. Through this, later in the day, the sun would pour into the interior and make the place almost unendurable.

The only entrance was at the side at the head of the path up which they had come and which, fast as they had passed, had showed to Jimmy's eye some indication of leading higher up the cliff.

There were four loopholes facing the cañon, two

in each main room, not counting the entrance. Tezah, favouring his wounded leg, down which the blood dripped steadily, began to block the latter waist high with loose stones. When the breast-work was completed he lay behind it, his rifle muzzle through a hole he had purposely left, his keen eyes looking through another, in complete command of the approach.

From none of the loopholes could Jimmy catch a glimpse of the two Danes or their ponies completely sheltered behind the great rock across the cañon. By piling up a platform he made himself a place from which he could watch for the approach of the third man, whom he expected to appear momentarily.

Whether he could stop him with his automatic was another matter. The ledge, he estimated, was, at the least, eighty feet above the cañon floor, which was itself about the same distance across. If the rider hugged the opposite wall it meant a range of more than thirty yards, and there were only a few spaces clear of boulders in which to sight his man.

He tried a sighting shot and the bullet fell a full foot below his mark. A second threw off far to the right at the end of the uncertain trajectory. A rifle shot came in swift answer, passing over his head, striking the rock above and dropping

into the chamber. Such bullets were not apt to be dangerous; but while their foes could not get in, much less could they themselves get out.

"Holed like a badger," thought Jimmy, grimly.

"And I am beginning to get thirsty. The thing to do is not to think about it, I suppose, but it's going to be tough presently for Tezah with that wound. As for Deborah, I'm afraid she's nearly all in already."

There was a glimpse of something shifting swiftly in the gap between the rock which hid the Danes and a neighbouring one. The big boulders, bleached by the sun, were scattered over the old river-bed like a flock of sheep, the smallest well able to shelter a man who went on all fours. Nearer the cliff and below the cave they were not so numerous.

That would be the younger Dane, Jimmy figured. The old man could not be in any too good shape after the night's adventures. Watching intently, he wondered what the purpose of the sortie could be. For what seemed several minutes he could detect nothing. Then, with Jimmy's bullets hitting the dust close beside him, Dane darted swiftly across an open space and squatted behind a stone the size and somewhat the shape of a rolltop desk.

"If he goes any farther I'll make it warm for

him," Jimmy muttered. "Show yourself, my murderous friend."

The barrel of Dane's rifle suddenly appeared and a shot was fired, evidently with random aim in the hope of diverting the enemy's attention, as Dane broke cover on the report and, bent double, ran toward the cliff. Jimmy's swift fusillade halted him, though none of the shots hit the moving mark, too far away for accuracy.

Dane fled back to the desk-like boulder and from that to the more closely connected rocks out of harm's way. Jimmy went back to Tezah in the adjoining room.

"Young Dane is trying to get to the cliff under us. Is there a path there that leads up here?"

"No, señor, the cliff falls straight. But below us is the big cave where the pictures of my tribe are on the walls to tell its greatness. In there is a water-hole. Perhaps they know of it."

"Water-hole!" At the mention of the word Jimmy's mouth parched suddenly and his thirst clamoured to be appeased. "Man, why didn't you take us there instead of here?"

He stood dumfounded at Tezah's stupidity.

"Because, señor, the entrance is only a crack in the rock. One must squeeze through slowly. While one entered they would have killed the rest."

It was a good answer, but the thought of a well

of cool water, even of tepid, muddy liquid, lying under their feet, was torture. Jimmy hoped that Deborah had not overheard or understood. Then her voice called him.

"Did you say something about *agua*?" she asked. "Because, if you did, I am terribly thirsty."

It smote Jimmy to the quick to deny her. He blamed himself utterly for having brought her to this mischance. For a few sentences he spoke almost incoherently.

"Oh, hush, hush," she said. "You have been wonderful, and you did it all for me. Is Tezah wounded badly? He must suffer far more than I do."

"Badly, but not seriously. I think he'll stand it better than we can, at that."

"Who hit him? My—my brother?"

"Listen, I had almost forgotten." Jimmy spoke cheerily.

The news would divert her for the time, help her to pass the cruel hours to come.

"I'll have to watch while I tell you," he said. "I think it's safe for you to come into the outer room if you stay close to the wall."

He saw her face brighten as he related the brief sentences he had overheard from the veranda.

"Thank God," she said when he had ended. "I

sometimes wondered at the way I felt toward him, the man I thought was my father. He would never tell me anything about my mother, and Ben always evaded the subject. There were no pictures of her—no letters.”

She fell to musing. Then she shuddered.

“And Ben wanted to marry me. That explains—many things. And he murdered Stimpson!”

Jimmy watched her narrowly. She was very pale and there were great circles about her eyes.

“We’re past that breaker,” he said, lightly. “You are going to marry me.”

She gave him the wraith of a smile, but did not answer.

A call came echoing down the cañon. Ben Dane answered it from his concealment. The third man was on his way to join them, having found no trail to indicate the flight of the fugitives.

Dane shouted a warning to him to dismount and keep under cover.

“Have you got any water?” he asked as the man answered.

“Yes.”

“How much?”

“Two canteens.”

Jimmy groaned in spirit as he noted Deborah’s wistful face that she tried to twist into a smile. Their side of the cañon was in shadow, but their

exertions had left them peculiarly susceptible to the lack of moisture in the sultry heat that was steadily growing greater.

"I'll spill it for them if I get a chance," he muttered, but he failed to get even a glimpse of the man until a shout from the big rock announced his safe arrival. Presently an additional aggravation, to Jimmy and the Indian, announced itself in the faint odour of tobacco.

"The whole thing started with a cigar," thought Jimmy, "and it looks as if it might end with a cigarette."

The day dragged. Tezah's wound stiffened and a high fever began to inflame his tissues. He did not complain, but his glassy eyes showed his sufferings. Jimmy grew almost afraid to look at Deborah as noon passed with a shifting of the sun to their side of the cañon and the radiation of the walls slowly baked them. His own tongue was swollen and his lips cracked so that he spoke with difficulty, and the girl's plight kept him in a sympathetic agitation that was constant.

They were trapped. All that the Danes had to do was to stay outside for a few hours, twenty-four would see the end, Jimmy thought, and he would be obliged to capitulate for the sake of the girl.

He did not bother his head about his own fate

in such a contingency, though he wondered whether it would not be better for the girl to die than to be delivered over to the Danes. He found some streaks of hope in the prospect, and to these he clung, backed by the signal that he had set flying nailed to the flagstaff of his determination by the grit that was so integral a part of his make-up.

"We'll jam through somehow."

Tezah was seated beside his rifle like a drowsy rattlesnake, the two bright eyes beneath the drooping lids flashing at every suspicious sound. Deborah had returned to the inner room and lay in a coma. Jimmy started to sum up the possibilities.

In the first place, the Danes could not stay there very long. They had been warned by Stimpson of trouble ahead. Both of them, *plus* the third man, wanted Jimmy out of the way, as witness to the murder and rival to Ben Dane. Ben Dane did not want Deborah killed of thirst. Sooner or later they would offer to capitulate. If the terms were not acceptable, and Jimmy felt no confidence that they would be, then, somehow or other, it was up to him to get water, food, and help.

Tezah, with one leg practically out of commission, was no longer available as a scout. He sat down beside the old chief. His voice croaked

as he spoke. His salivary glands had long ago ceased their functions, palate and cheeks and tongue seemed mushroomed together.

"This path," Jimmy pointed to the one outside the entrance that Tezah guarded, "it goes higher?"

"Yes, señor." The Indian's words were hardly distinguishable. "But the way is broken. Once there were ladders. Long ago. The path led to the Aco. It is above us. We are beneath its protection. We shall win clear at last, señor. The Aco will set us free."

Jimmy said nothing. The idea of a white stone stuck in the cliff above them having any power beyond that engendered by the priesthood of a superstitious race would, under other circumstances, have seemed laughable. When Tezah had proposed hiding in the cañon he had doubtless had the Aco in mind, and Jimmy mentally kicked himself for having followed the Indian's advice.

"How far did the path lead?"

"I know not, señor. Perhaps to the Aco. It was a priest path. No one else would dare to use it. Not even I, the chief. And the ladders were taken down when the Pueblo people drove out my tribe from the cañon."

Priests, Jimmy reflected, were not always the most agile of the tribe. Where aged bones needed

ladders the desperate sinews of youth might find a way. If he could clamber to the top he could get food and water from the Curly O ranch house. Ah Fung and the wounded man had been set free by the automobile driver by this time, he supposed. Perhaps they had gone to Aztec.

The man might have been naturally disgruntled at his comrades' desertion of him. Ah Fung was a coward. The determined sticking of the Danes to the siege of the cave under all the circumstances was stiffened, Jimmy believed, by the younger Dane. In their place, he figured, he would pretend to withdraw in the hope that the besieged would think the way clear. That would be done after nightfall. If he could win a way to the cliff-top by the priest path and get ropes, food, and water from the Curly O ranch house, they might all manage to escape up the cliff.

It all crystallized to one conclusion. He, Jimmy, had to tackle the priest path as soon as it was dark. On that resolve he rested and with it tried to bolster up the weary hours. The sun poured in through the gap between the ruined walls and the top of the cave and the heat grew unbearable. Shadows were merely a colour distinction. The stones were hot enough to fry eggs on, Jimmy told himself—if they only had eggs. His automatic was blistering to the touch.

All of Tezah's vitality had vanished with the suffering from his wound. He looked like the mummy of some ancient cliff dweller come out of the past once more to protest against the invasion of his cave. Only his eyelids twitched occasionally as he maintained his tireless watch. From the sweltering inner cave Jimmy could hear Deborah moaning faintly from time to time. Yet all he could do was to await darkness with what patience he could muster. With it would come relief from the heat in a swift drop of the temperature.

The sun's rays left the cave mouth at last and shifted upward across the great dial of the cliff. Twilight fell rapidly and night seemed to sweep down the cañon on dusky wings that trailed a veil behind.

From behind the big rock where the Danes kept their vigil a ruddy glow danced upon the cliff behind. They had found wood brought down by some cloudburst. The leaping fire had suggestions of food and tobacco and water, principally water, that held torment for the two watchers in the cave with cracked and puffy lips and swollen tongues. The girl was asleep.

"One good swallow of water," thought Jimmy, "would help me a long way up that cliff." He summoned his spirit and sat with it in conference.

Then he marshalled every resource of his body and reviewed its strength. His head grew clear under the imperative mandate of his resolve, the thirst subsided, and he felt the rally of his blood ordering the corpuscular regiments into line.

He motioned Tezah to one side and stepped lightly over the barrier in the doorway. The Danes had started a second fire in a space between two flanking rocks where it lit up the bottom of the trail. Above him the trail loomed uncertainly and, far up, he caught the gray patch of the Aco, the legendary white stone of Quetzal the god.

"Where are you going?" whispered Tezah, huskily. "Not on the priest path, señor. The ghosts will destroy you."

"If there are any ghosts up there," Jimmy made shift to answer, "I'll make them give me a hand. Stay here and look out for the señorita."

While he stood flattened against the cliff he balanced the chances of a descent to the water-hole in the cave. But the hazard of passing the fires was too great. He turned to the ascent.

As he mounted he saw the Indian by the breast-work of the entrance, his arms outstretched to Aco, the whites of his eyes faintly visible in the starlit dusk.

CHAPTER XV

BEHIND THE ACO

THE priest path was a different matter from the almost trackless way by which Tezah had piloted Jimmy up and down the cliff the night before. He found a well-defined and practical trail, long unused, crumbling in places, but for the most part either following a natural ledge or hewn from the solid rock. It was dust-covered, and he managed to zigzag noiselessly halfway to the Aco before he came to a spot where the ledge ended abruptly.

As well as Jimmy could tell in the obscurity, it continued once more far above his head. Groping, he found deep excavations in the rock, three of them at regular intervals, in a slanting line, of the same size and apparently man-made. The highest one was half plugged by timber that crushed between his fingers. They were the sockets of an ancient ladder.

The face of the cliff was vertical. By using the holes for foot and hand holds a bold man could climb to the next stage. Somehow, will backing

nerve and nerve forcing flesh-and-blood coördination, he crept, clinging like a limpet across the precipice. Twice he hung precariously while one hand cleared a socket of decayed wood. Once a great wave of dizziness, born of thirst and hunger, nearly overmastered him and sent him plunging into the depths. The holes angled forward and backward tracing a letter "W" sideways on the up-and-down surface.

When Jimmy drew himself up to a continuation of the ledge, trembling and panting from his exertions, he calculated that the point he had reached was immediately above the one where he had found the first socket. The ladders had been slanted in such fashion, he surmised, to make the ascent easier for burden bearers.

A fairly good trail led once more toward the summit. Jimmy followed it until it stopped in front of the Aco, a mass of white quartz, irregularly faced, bulging out from the granite. His eyes were growing more used to the darkness. It seemed lighter near the summit and the colour of the Aco aided his vision. Above it was a cleft in the precipice much like the chimney on the other trail. It split the cliff fairly to its top.

"I can get through that, all right," Jimmy told himself, "if I can get at it."

He surveyed the Aco more carefully. Its

surface was bossed freely with projections that he thought he could negotiate. The stone was circular and inclined to convexity. Once past the centre the way to the rift was easy.

It was no use looking at it. His fingers were raw and stiffened into hooks that he could straighten only with pain and difficulty, and at the core of his physical being something warned him that he was nearing the end of his strength, reserves and all.

"It's now or never," he muttered, and tackled the climb, following the rim of the circle.

As he neared the line of its horizontal diameter he fancied the stone trembled slightly, but his own overstrained arteries made his senses unreliable. His ears were ringing, his eyes blurred, and his head seemed split by a wedge that relentlessly sank deeper at every effort.

The cliff seemed to swing wildly and he hung tremblingly to the uneven portions of the rock. It oscillated, out and back again, then, as Jimmy desperately scrambled toward the rift above him, the Aco swung as on a pivot, suddenly shot forward, and leaped into space. Jimmy, sliding down the smoothed inner surface of the rock as it broke loose from whatever delicately balanced trigger had held it in place, found himself lying in the gorge of a tunnel that the sacred stone had blocked.

He heard the shattering crash of the Aco far below and crept to the lip of the tunnel mouth, gazing fearfully downward.

The Danes were firing, two at the cliff dwelling, another upward toward the source of the falling rock. Tezah's rifle rang out in answer.

"Good man," thought Jimmy. "They may think this is a natural accident as long as they imagine we're still in the cave." He lay still until the firing ceased and proved his reasoning correct. He got to his feet and looked for the rift. It had vanished with the fall of the Aco.

The natural cave had been enlarged by man into a bore, like the muzzle of a cannon of which the Aco had formed the plug. About it the rock was almost as smooth as glass. From the top of the Aco he might have reached the cleft, now, left within the cave mouth, he could not even see it. Nothing was to be done but to return or explore the tunnel.

He felt a draft of cold, refreshing air issuing from the black throat. The ground pitched downward as he ventured in. Ten feet from the entrance timbers partly blocked the tunnel. He kicked at them and some of them fell in fragments.

Jimmy felt for his matchesafe and, carefully shielding the tiny flame from the remote possi-

bility of its being seen from below, tried one of the splinters of the broken gateway as a torch. It burned quickly but well and he tossed it ahead on the floor of the tunnel. Rock-vaulted, it seemed to run far into the cliff, slanting steadily downward. As the torch flared the darkness back of it took apparent shape and a multitude of wings fanned the brand as a flock of bats rushed outward with a musky odour that was overpowering.

He collected a load of the wooden fragments and, lighting them one by one, as soon as he had progressed twenty feet into the tunnel, walked rapidly down the passage that nature had started as a rift in the cooling rock walls after fire and earthquake had reared them. Man had adapted them to his own punier and more devious devices by toil that must have taken the efforts of hundreds for as many months.

Even when Jimmy grew later more familiar with the labyrinth he marvelled at its extent. Now, in his fast-failing strength, the way seemed interminable. Far down the gullet of the cliff the corridor opened into a circular chamber, lifting too high above his head for the torchlight to discover a roof, remnants of ruined ladders clinging to the walls.

As, for the moment, he paused irresolute, he heard somewhere in the dark the staccato *drip-*

drip of falling water. A myriad thirst-devils attacked him in force, seeming to materialize from the blackness. He reeled on and entered a high tunnel at the farther end of the chamber, his senses vaguely telling him that the rough rock had been worn smooth by the passing of the feet of many generations. He stopped to light a fresh torch splinter and, as the new light flared and the old, cast on the floor, leaped up, he caught sight of a mass of masonry to his right with the stones hand-piled and cemented.

One foot crunched through the mouldering ribs of a skeleton, the other hit with a muffled thud a skull that crumbled at the kick. For a hundred feet he stumbled through a charnel-house of bones piled in the passage. Here and there a skeleton stood upright against the tunnel wall in grisly sentinel fashion. One of these standing Deaths toppled as he passed it, its arms striking him, the skull toppling from the vertebræ, and the bony cheek plates brushing his face.

Had Jimmy been less desperately clinging to the remnant of his vitality, brain and nerve subsidized to the physical effort of following the lure of the water, his courage might have left him a demented wanderer in the hall of death; but whether it was a phantom conjured by hope, or a mocking echo, the *drip-drip* of flowing liquid sounded clear

ahead and a regiment of mouldering skeletons could not have withstood the instinctive drive of his despairing body for the saving element.

The tunnel narrowed, widened, narrowed again, and slanted swiftly downward at so sharp an angle that he had hard work to keep his balance at the automatically accelerated pace. A level floor rose up in the dark to meet him, the air grew suddenly colder and sweet, and he was conscious of wide spaces all about him. Straight to the sound of water he went as filings to a magnet, his torch held high above his head.

Its light was caught in the sparkle of a thread of water dripping from ledge to ledge and splashing into the inky contents of a rock-bound pool. Alkali water would have seemed nectar to Jimmy at that moment, and the spring water seemed to inject itself into his veins with every sip as if the cavern cistern were a veritable fountain of youth. The torch on the ground beside him, he crouched like a wild beast and lapped the brimming liquid, sousing his neck and head with it, rising at last invigorated and restrung.

His spirit smote him with a charge of selfishness, absurd though the idea was, at the thought of his relief and the girl's enduring torment, and Tezah's. He looked around him in the wild hope of finding some receptacle in which he could carry water to

them before they essayed the climb to this safer retreat.

The torchlight lit up crude drawings in red and black upon the walls, pictures of men and beasts, faded portrayals, many of them, of extinct animals, at once the picture-gallery and the library of the cave dwellers.

The remembrance of the talk on the Curly O veranda flashed upon him. This cave must be the place where the Shepherd had said the "outfit" was buried, the cave Tezah had mentioned. And from it there must be an exit to the cañon. Jimmy's brains, revived by his body's saturation, gauged the possibilities.

The Danes might enter. It was not likely they would do so as long as they believed their quarry cooped up in the cliff dwelling. Evidently they did not know of the opening behind the Aco. Tezah's fire from the cliff house would keep them confident of having retained command of the situation.

He swept the torch around in a circle. There were traces of a fire close to the pool, a little pile of unburned wood, a pack-saddle, and—Jimmy's heart leaped at the sight—two coils of rope. On a rock-shelf utilized as a cupboard were a few cans of provisions and a battered kettle. A miner's candlestick was thrust into a crevice, a few inches

of the candle still in the socket, and beneath it rested a shovel.

Jimmy did not waste time in an endeavour to find the entrance. Tezah would know where that was. He slung the coils of rope about him, stuffed a can of tomatoes and one of beef into his pockets, filled the kettle, and retraced his steps up the incline, through the passage of skeletons, past the wall of masonry, across the circular chamber, and up once more through the bore to its muzzle, where the night air blew warningly against the flicker of his torch and, above the dark cliff across the cañon, the stars twinkled in the free air.

One of the posts of the ancient gateway was still round and firm. To it Jimmy swiftly fastened the two coils of rope, knotting them at foot intervals before he let them lead to the rim of the cliff where the Aco had been and dangle down to the path. He slung the kettle canteenwise and prepared to descend. The campfire of the Danes glowed behind the big rock, but the men were out of sight even from the height. They were singing. In the calm night the derisive lilt of it rolled up to him:

In a cañon by a river
In a deep and dark ravine,
Dwelt a miner, forty-niner,
And his daughter, Clementine.

Then the raucous chorus of men whose voices had been unleashed by drink:

Oh, my darling! oh, my darling!
Oh, my darling, Clementine!
You are dead and gone forever,
Drefffal sorry, Clementine.

Jimmy gritted his teeth as he let himself down by the ropes, hand after hand, his feet, feeling for holds, striking now and then one of the ladder sockets by which he had climbed up. Deborah, he hoped, was still unconscious in the half swoon, half sleep, in which he had left her. Below the Danes and their helper were chanting in mockery:

Drivin' ducks down to the water,
Drivin' ducks into the brine,
When she stumbled—in she tumbled,
Dead and drown-ded, Clementine.

The pull of the canteen against his shoulders reconciled Jimmy somewhat to the ballad with the ironical reference to cañons with water in them. His feet found the priest path as the chorus broke out again:

Oh, my darling! oh, my darling!

"It'll keep the fools occupied," he told himself, as he sped down the trail, made its angle, and reached

the cliff dwelling. He was barely in time. Tezah had succumbed at last to the fever of his wound and lack of food and water, and sprawled in the entrance with his rifle free of his nerveless hand. The Danes could have entered at will.

Jimmy stepped across the Indian, sprinkling him as he passed with a blessing from the spout of the battered kettle, and went in to the inner chamber where Deborah lay.

His heart stood still as he put the kettle down and listened in vain for her breathing. Had she died while he was wallowing in the spring? He struck a match and saw the pallid oval of her face fringed by its flame of hair above the pitiful huddle of her body. The once scarlet lips were purple, swollen, and broken, the tip of her swollen tongue protruded between her teeth.

A deadly fear that he had beaten back a hundred times in his struggle to the water brought the sweat to his forehead and a swift pang of agony to his heart. Outside the men were still repeating their maudlin chorus:

You are dead and gone forever,
Dreffful sorry, Clementine.

Red rage swept over him.

"Damn them," he said aloud, "if she's dead, if they've killed her, I'll go down there and clear

them out. I'll get them through the big cave and surprise them. I'll tie them up to scorch to death in the sun with bowls of water all about them!"

As he muttered he knelt by Deborah, the swift match light gone, and poured water prodigally upon her face, lifting her head to his lap as he changed position, calling softly to her to come back to life again.

CHAPTER XVI

TEZAH MAKES A FIND

THERE was the sound of a croaking voice behind him.

"Señor," said Tezah, "I swooned and I thought it had rained and awakened me. Was it water you brought?"

Jimmy was oblivious to the appeal in the Indian's voice.

"I have water," he said, "but it is of no use, Tezah. She is dead."

"No, señor, not yet. She was too young and strong to die so easily. I should have died first. Where is the water?"

Afterward Jimmy remembered that the thirst-tortured chief did not drink until they had brought Deborah back to consciousness. Yet the splashing gurgle of the liquid in the half-filled kettle must have called to every shrunken fibre of his being. And he, Jimmy, the white man, had drunk. If he had not he could never have come back to them, but somehow, in the abnegation of the Indian, the excuse seemed a paltry subterfuge.

"A wet cloth, señor, to her lips," croaked Tezah. "And water on her wrists and ankles—so."

They worked in silence. Then the tense jaws relaxed, the girl's body shifted as the pulses reacted to the chill of the water, and Deborah moaned. Automatically she sucked at the soaked strip of cloth. Jimmy poured water into the lid of the kettle, spilling it in the darkness but guiding it to her lips, one arm about her neck.

"Not too much, señor," gasped Tezah.

The rasp of his voice brought Jimmy to a realization of the other's endurance.

"Drink, Tezah," he said.

"*Gracias*, señor."

"Jimmy?"

He caught the faint whisper and bent his face to hers.

"Yes, sweetheart. Drink a little. Presently you shall have more. And food."

Youth's elasticity rebounded promptly. Within ten minutes the girl sat up against the crumbling wall and filled her mouth with the grateful pulp from the can of tomatoes that Jimmy hacked open with his knife while Tezah held the match.

From what mysterious asset the ancient tribesman drew upon for a renewal of vigour it was hard to fathom, but the glaze in his eyes changed to a glitter of fresh purpose and with a share of the

canned beef he crawled back to his post again. Presently, as Deborah grew stronger, they joined him and Jimmy told them of his discovery.

"If you can manage it," he said, "we may be able to get into the cañon and win clear. Or we can surprise them perhaps, though if we can get by without fighting it will be better not to risk it. How about your leg, Tezah?"

"I can manage, señor. The Aco has fallen. Quetzal has shown the way. I can pass along it. More than that, señor."

He broke off and fired down the dim trail. Jimmy could see nothing, but the savage keenness had caught sight of two dim shapes more solid than the shadows in which they tried to merge themselves. There was the swift scurry of shoes on shingle, a return shot fired from the protection of the rock, and the sortie ended by Jimmy firing a random bullet from his automatic.

"Just to let them know we are all here," he said.

Then they took counsel.

"It grows colder," said Tezah. "By midnight they will hug the fire more closely. They have been singing as men do who drink. The liquor will make them sleepy. They will watch the bottom of the trail, but if we rest awhile and go very softly, they will not see us climb. From below the priest path does not show."

They ate the rest of the food and finished the water. Then they sat quietly, Deborah's hand in Jimmy's, Tezah motionless, recruiting strength for the ordeal of the climb.

The fire died down, was replenished, and faded again to a mere glimmer. In the hope that they might avoid the climb, Jimmy stole down the trail, trusting that the watchers had fallen asleep. Half-way his foot hit a stone in the darkness.

It made but little noise but there was a flash and the crack of a rifle as a bullet smacked against the cliff within a foot of his head. He got back in safety, chagrined in one way, elated in another. His attempt would strengthen the idea that there was only one way of escape open.

They waited for half an hour by Jimmy's watch before they started and gained the foot of the dangling ropes without alarm. Jimmy swung to one and guided the girl's feet to the ladder holes as she angled backward and forward to the lip of the tunnel. Then he returned to aid Tezah. Not a murmur escaped the Indian though he had but little use of his wounded leg. They entered the tunnel, Tezah hobbling along with his rifle as a support. They passed the circular chamber and reached the corridor of skeletons.

Through this dreadful avenue, lit by the flaming torch, Deborah hurried with shudders as her feet

broke through the brittle bones. Tezah's face was filled with awe but twice he stooped and picked up something that he tucked away in the long scarf that served him for a belt. At the pool Jimmy forced Deborah to lie down on the sand that carpeted the place. Tezah pointed out the exit. As he had said, it was a narrow and tortuous passage with the final outlet a low triangle to pass which even the girl would have to stoop.

Tezah peered into the pitch of the lower cañon then gestured Jimmy to his place.

The angle of vision partly concealed the fire behind the rock. It was burning brightly once more and he could hear the sound of voices. His attempt to pass by the lower trail had forced them to alertness once again. The cliff was painted deep orange by the flare and on this background showed the shadows of both the Danes, the Shepherd with his patriarchal beard and the bull neck and broad shoulders of the son and the tossing heads of the two horses.

The fire reflection was not limited to the area immediately surrounding it. The fresh fuel sent it dancing across the cañon, splitting up the night into sectional shadows and resting on the rim of the egress where Jimmy crouched. To emerge would be to stand for a moment in the ruddy glare. The slightest sound, the click of a pebble, the drag

of Tezah's leg on the shingle would betray them before they could get clear. The firelight flickering on the rock beside him was so bright that Jimmy looked at his watch.

It was twenty minutes to two. Two and a half hours more would bring the dawn to the cañon's rim, another thirty minutes would dissipate the dusk in the ravine. Then the hole where the Aco had once stood would be evident to the Danes and their retreat would be soon discovered. It might have been better, thought Jimmy, if he had taken all the provisions down to the cliff dwelling and they had stood siege from there. But it was too late now for the change and Tezah could not have stood a second day in that natural oven even if Deborah could have done so.

He wondered where they had buried Stimpson and where they had cachéd the boxes brought from the cañon. As he pondered he caught the chatter of Tezah's teeth. The Indian's impoverished and scanty blood was hard put to it to resist the biting cold that Jimmy suddenly became conscious of.

Deborah must be suffering in the cave. He whispered to Tezah to return and build a fire near the cavern well. The turnings of the entrance would effectually screen its glimmer from the cañon. The chief took his matches and departed.

Jimmy watched on, straining to catch the words

of the men by the fire. The blaze was burning more quietly and now and then he distinguished a word or a sentence that gave him the general drift of the talk. The Shepherd seemed to be advising his son of the danger of too long delay and the latter scoffed at his suggestions. Finally a sentence broke clear as the younger Dane raised his voice:

"I'll not leave without Deborah, and that's flat. And Hollister's mouth has got to be shut for keeps. The one who called you Shepherd has gone. As for the Indian——"

The last words were indistinguishable as was the growling answer of the Shepherd. Jimmy felt the touch of a hand on his arm and Deborah's breath close to his cheek as she whispered:

"I'm warm now. Let me watch. You must be nearly frozen."

She insisted on it and promised to retreat at the first indication of alarm. Jimmy found Tezah replenishing the fire, feeding it carefully with scraps of wood that he groped for on the floor of the cave. Suddenly he uttered a low exclamation and held up something for Jimmy's inspection.

It was a disc of yellow metal, bright in the light of the flame, a newly minted twenty-dollar gold-piece. At the sight and feel of it inspiration came to Jimmy. He thrust a brand into the blaze until

the end burned bravely, and began an inspection of the wall paintings. The torch had nearly sputtered to an end before he found the petroglyph he was looking for, the rough yet spirited drawing of an Indian shooting arrows into a bison.

The sand was soft though packed, and digging was easy with the shovel left in the cave by the Danes. About four feet below the surface metal struck metal. The secret of the buried "outfit" of the boxes packed from the cañon, the "stuff" that Deborah had unwittingly carried in the trunks, the ring of the double-eagles that night at Stimpson's ranch, was revealed by the uncovering of the caché. The Danes were counterfeiters. Moulds, a furnace, and the tools of a minting equipment were buried in the sand.

There was no use in Deborah's seeing them, Jimmy decided. She would feel herself involved in the crime. While Tezah watched and nursed his leg, forbidden by Jimmy to assist, the latter reburied the evidence and smoothed down the sand. The work warmed him and he was glowing as he replaced the pick and spade just as Deborah came across the cave to the ring of firelight.

Dawn was coming, she announced, and their enemies were astir. Jimmy went back to the entrance, the girl behind him. The black night had turned purple. Every tick of his watch saw the

purple turn to gray and the narrow ribbon of radiance on the eastern brink that he could just see by twisting his neck widen as the sun lifted. A horse neighed shrilly. Down the cañon the horse of the third man answered.

The voice of the third man rang out sharply. He seemed to have been watching the trail to the cliff dwelling. The few words smote Jimmy with self-reproach.

"Look at those ropes!"

In their hurried retreat they had left the lines dangling after Tezah had made the tunnel back of the Aco. There was an oath from young Dane and Jimmy heard the clutter of his movements behind the big rock. He had gone up to the cliff dwelling.

"Go back to Tezah," said Jimmy to Deborah. "See if he can walk. Perhaps we can slip away."

She left him. The rock still masked the movements of the besiegers though in their excitement their speech was plainly heard. Young Dane came back from the cliff dwelling.

"They've all gone up the cliff," he shouted. "That hole leads to our cave. They got our kettle from it and some of the grub."

"Hell!"

The Shepherd's bass supplied the oath.

The light strengthened rapidly. Mist swirled

in the bottom of the cañon like smoke. A rifle-barrel appeared around the rock followed by the Shepherd's beard and then Dane's face swiftly ducking as he crouched behind the barrier of two boulders from which he could command the entrance to the big cave. Jimmy was out of position and his bullet sped too late. They were effectually blockaded.

"Are you hurt?"

Jimmy reassured Deborah, who had brought the news that Tezah's leg had stiffened overnight so that he could barely crawl.

"No chance of travelling yet," said Jimmy. "They've got us corraled. But we've got food and water and we'll be able to keep cool. Tell Tezah to cover the passage we came through in case they try to tackle us that way."

He could see the muzzle of the Shepherd's Winchester like a menacing, unwinking eye from between the boulders. The siege was still on.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SHOT IN THE CAÑON

BEFORE Deborah reached Tezah, Hollister thought of a better plan. It was possible that by daylight he might be able to get at the besiegers from the mouth of the Aco tunnel if they showed themselves in the open. It was foolish to leave the ropes hanging there in any event.

He posted Deborah at the cave mouth with his automatic and strict instructions not to expose herself to a chance shot from the Shepherd's rifle. If she kept well out of sight they would think that Jimmy himself was on guard, he figured, and they knew his shooting well enough to be respectful of it. He took Tezah's rifle, hurried back to the Aco gap, and crawling to the edge looked down.

He could see nothing of the Danes. One of the horses was partly visible but he refrained from firing at the dumb brute. The cliff was fairly vertical, so sheer in its first descent from where he lay that it was hard for him to aim across the acute angle of the ledge with any precision, save

at the base of the opposite wall. By cautiously craning out to the danger-point he could look down at the trail that led to the cliff dwelling.

Moving back, he hauled in the telltale ropes. The action passed unnoticed, to his surprise. He stood in the mouth of the tunnel coiling the lines, preparatory to the descent, when a shot roared in the cañon near the head of the draw, its sound split into a hundred echoes between the cliffs. Another answered it from farther down. There came the scurrying clatter and ring of horses' hoofs racing over and among boulders at top speed, coming from both directions.

Jimmy saw the Shepherd catch at the bridle of the exposed horse and mount. His son appeared beside him. The horse of the third man came dashing up the ravine. It stepped on its dangling bridle and crashed to the ground as its owner ran toward it.

Suddenly the arms of both the Danes flew upward and stayed there. Pigmyed by the distance, they looked like jumping-jacks jerked by a hidden string. Two stern words of command floated upward to Jimmy.

"Hands up!"

Four horsemen rode up with levelled rifles and surrounded the Danes. On the blue shirt of one of them Jimmy caught the glitter of a metal badge.

He could see three more farther down the cañon riding between the boulders as he gazed at the little drama like a spectator in a theatre gallery. The third counterfeiter had dropped behind a rock and, leaving his horse, started to crawl toward the cliff.

Apparently the posse was uncertain of the size of the party and, for the moment, he went unseen, disappearing from Jimmy's line of vision until the latter wriggled to the edge and saw him directly below, scurrying along the trail to the cliff dwelling bent almost double, his rifle at the carry.

There was a shout from the man with the metal badge of office and a cry to the fugitive to stop. Almost at the doorway he stretched out a hand to climb over the barrier Tezah had erected. One of the newcomers raised a quick rifle and fired. The man straightened to full height, spun about with wildly clutching hands and as his rifle fell, followed it, rolling down the trail a few feet and then plunging to the bottom as the rest of the posse rode up.

It was evidently the timely arrival of the pursuit that Stimpson had feared. Would the Danes tell of their reason for being in the cañon? Did the man with the badge—he would be the sheriff, Jimmy decided—already know? Deborah would be implicated! He turned and sped through the

tunnel, blundering along, striking a match now and then to guide him.

He must get Deborah away. He could carry Tezah—perhaps the Indian might know of some hiding-place; they could scramble up one of the ladders in the circular chamber or burrow somewhere in the labyrinth! The chance of chivalry enough in the nature of the Danes to shield the girl was remote. Ben Dane would know he was leaving her to Hollister!

With such thoughts crowding his brain Jimmy arrived breathless in the big cave and, guided by the fire, sprang across to the entrance. Tezah lay in a doze unconscious of what had happened. Jimmy clawed his way to the exit. The girl was crouching in the triangular opening. She turned, wide-eyed, at his approach.

"Come back," he whispered. "Quickly!"

She obeyed him, not speaking till they reached the cave.

"They've gone," she said.

"Gone!"

"Down the cañon and taken them with them. They killed Carl, I think. He was lying across his saddle."

"Down the cañon, you say. Then we can get over to my place. Tezah!"

He aroused the Indian and explained matters.

"You'll be safe here for a while," he said. "I'll come back for you with a pony as soon as I can."

The chief acquiesced without comment and Jimmy hurried the girl from the cave and up the cañon.

"Why can't we fetch Tezah right away?" she asked. "He must be suffering, and his wound ought to be properly dressed."

Jimmy looked at her without slackening speed. She knew nothing of the gold-piece in his pocket and the counterfeiting outfit.

"They may be looking for you," he said. "They may think you were mixed up in whatever they wanted them for."

She stopped, panting for breath. They were halfway to the top of the cañon.

"I was," she cried. "They must have found Jerry at the ranch and Ah Fung. They would tell. There is the murder of Stimpson besides. They will try to bring you into it. I must not be seen with you. You will be arrested for trying to protect me. Let me go!"

She struggled to pass him, close to a breakdown, her endurance vanishing in hysteria. Jimmy gripped her by the wrists.

"Nonsense," he said. "You had nothing to do with it except innocently."

"They won't believe that. Let me go. I told you not to come to Aztec."

"Where do you want to go?"

"Back to the cave. Anywhere!"

"Listen."

He held her firmly with one hand and slipped his free arm about her waist.

"You are coming with me. You have done nothing wrong. I am going to get you clear. We'll go back East. Everything can be arranged."

She still struggled, the pupils of her eyes dilated, unheeding. Jimmy saw she did not comprehend his words and suddenly he stooped and kissed her full on the lips.

"I am not going to let you go," he said. "Be sure of that. Don't get frightened."

Her eyes welled over and her mouth quivered.

"You will take care of me?" she asked in the voice of a child. "But you mustn't kiss me. You mustn't pretend to love me. I—I am so tired."

She leaned against him with a sigh, utterly worn out, clinging to him pitifully, her knees failing her, sliding through his embrace.

He took her up in his arms as he had carried Tezah and clambered on to the rim, soothing her with little phrases of comfort. It was no time to talk of love, he saw that plainly. She was still obsessed with the idea of an unworthy taint

that clung to her. She lay limp to his strength, sobbing.

At the head of the cañon she recovered herself.

"Put me down," she said. "I can walk now."

Everything was peaceful at Capricorn Lodge. The goats were grazing quietly, and Solo was at the spring with Tezah's pony. Jimmy made some strong coffee and forced her to share it. It brought colour back to her cheeks and light to her eyes though she persistently avoided his gaze.

"How long will it take them to get here—if they come?" she asked presently.

Jimmy considered.

"I think Ah Fung and Jerry must have got clear in the automobile," he said. "If that is the case, and they know anything about you, they will think you went with them. For some reason the Shepherd and Ben have not talked, probably because they don't want to do anything to bring my evidence into the case. They may figure that the sheriff will take them out on an early train and that they can dodge the murder of Stimpson. They've buried him and the boxes safely, I imagine. In any case, we have several hours to spare. We'll take the ponies and I'll leave you on Diablo while I ride down and bring Tezah back. We can't go blindly into Aztec. The best thing to do will be to make for Floravista or camp out until

I can scout 'round, see if the coast is clear, and find out the situation. It might be best to stay here at the ranch. We can talk that over later. The first thing is to get Tezah."

She seemed to have gained full control of herself and Jimmy mounted her on Solo, who proved docile. He took Tezah's cayuse and they rode off to the peak. Deborah was silent and Jimmy watched her sympathetically, wishing she would let him share the thoughts that showed their trend in the sadness of her face and eyes. But he decided to be patient though his heart ached to console her, to take her in his arms and kiss away the solitude with which she had environed herself.

It was a lonely prospect that she conjured up, he guessed. Bereft of even the barren props of a false father and brother, determined to consider herself unworthy of his love and comfort, the edifice of her future must seem desolate indeed.

He left her on the ledge where he had first found her after his arrival at Aztec, gazing dry-eyed to the distant range across the arid lands.

"You'll stay here until I come back with Tezah?" he asked. "I'll need your help in fixing him up."

She turned a weary face toward him, seeming to bring back her thoughts from a far journey.

"Yes, I'll be here."

He rode off on Solo after lengthening the stirrups, leading the Indian's pony, feeling relieved. For a moment he had been suspicious that she might do something desperate in her self-abandonment while he was gone.

Tezah was still beside the fire. He had cleansed his wound in the cold water of the well and bound it up. As Jimmy entered he looked up cheerily.

"The fever has gone out of the wound, señor," he said. "We will gather herbs and it will soon be well. The señorita is safe?"

Jimmy nodded. Tezah improvised a cane from the dry wood in the cave and, with Hollister's assistance, hobbled from the cave and mounted his pony, refreshed by a long pull from the whisky Jimmy had thought to bring from the ranch. His eyes held fire and he carried his head high, his wizened but tough frame seeming little the worse for their adventures.

Of the two he showed less weariness, thought Jimmy, acutely conscious now of his stiffened muscles and raw hands. As they rode on in the heat the need of sleep fought with his will until he nodded in the saddle. Tezah's voice, with an odd ring of triumph in it, aroused him.

"Did I not say, señor, that the treasure of Yojilla would not be found until the Aco fell? Look—I found these as we passed through the

skeletons. That passage was the burial-place of dead priests placed there to guard the mine."

"The mine?"

Jimmy resolutely blinked away the heaviness from his lids.

"Yes, señor. I told you it was walled up. We passed the stones. Behind them is the lost mine. I picked those up outside the wall."

Jimmy turned over the specimens of turquoise matrix veined and starred with gold.

"There is much of it?" he queried.

"Yes, señor. So the priest told my father's father. You are a rich man, señor."

"I? Why, it is yours. You are the chief of the Yojillas."

"It is yours, señor. What would I do with gold? If it is mine, I give it to you. But it is not. It was you who climbed the priest path guarded by Quetzal. It was for you the Aco fell and left you unharmed. The ghosts of the dead did not assail you. They let you pass in peace. I am the last of the Yojillas and an old man who wants only fire and food and peace. It is yours, señor."

"It belongs equally to the three of us perhaps," said Jimmy. "We found it together. A third for the señorita, a third for you, and a third for me."

"There is plenty for all," said the chief. "If you wish me to have a part of it I will take it so

that I may make a gift to your children. Yours and the señorita's."

It was a golden vision that Tezah conjured up. Jimmy heaved a great breath of desire and hope for its fulfilment as they reached the top of the trail and headed for Diablo.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SUSPICION OF THE SHERIFF

ONCE at Capricorn Lodge, Tezah's wound was dressed and Jimmy made him comfortable on a couch while Deborah, still very quiet, got ready an ample meal. Tezah insisted upon hobbling to the table and refused to allow the girl to make an invalid of him.

Deborah listened in silence as Jimmy discussed plans for getting out of the vicinity before the officers became active in identifying them with the Curly O outfit. When he paused for her opinion she answered in a voice firm with determination.

"I have made up my mind what to do," she said. "I am going to accept your help to get to Denver. I must. I have to borrow the fare."

She made a failure of her laugh and Jimmy gulped at the droop of her lips and the apathy in her eyes.

"I have friends there," she went on, "who will help me to get a position of some sort and keep me until I can repay them—and you."

"But you are not poor." Jimmy produced the specimens. "We are rich—the three of us. The old mine of the Aco is in the tunnel by the skeletons back of the wall we passed. I still consider that Tezah has first claim to it as the chief of the Yojillas but he insists that but for us it would never have been discovered. So we are going to divide it into three equal parts.

"Tezah is adamant," he went on, quickly, sensing her dissent. "If we won't take it to-day he is going to will it to us. We can't escape him. Besides, he needs our aid to develop it."

"Your aid, not mine," said Deborah. "You found the tunnel. I have no claim upon it. I cannot accept it."

For a moment Jimmy would have liked to shake her. Her refusal was exasperating. So was Tezah's presence. He glanced at the Indian and the chief's shrewd old eyes seemed to twinkle as he took the hint and, muttering something about "the goats," left the room despite Deborah's protest.

When he was gone Jimmy looked at her steadily until her face grew scarlet and her lids drooped.

"I hardly know what to say to you, Deborah. I am so afraid of making a mistake. My happiness hangs upon it and I think yours as well. Why do you want to go away from me? What can you

do in the world alone? I love you. I believe you love me, or your lips lied when they met mine. You know I came to Aztec for your sake. Perhaps I have done something—enough to ask for a reward. You are free from the Danes. You know you are not of their blood.

“We have gone through danger together. We have been comrades in peril. If you cared—as I care, Deborah—why not be comrades now that the peril has passed? If you will tell me you do not care—why, that ends it. I will take you to Denver and give you to the friends you prefer to ask favours of.”

He tried to keep the bitterness out of his voice but his face was haggard as he sat facing her, his hands folded tightly, his gaze compelling hers.

“Oh, you make it hard—hard,” she said. “When the glamour of all this peril that we shared has died out you will realize what I am trying to tell you. How could I come to you—to your father—in the consciousness of my association with the Danes? It has been almost the same as if I was his daughter only—now I am nameless. I do not know of what stock I came save that it is likely to be one to be ashamed of. I am liable to arrest—I—I——”

“Tell me you do not care for me, Deborah.”

She tried to meet the challenge.

"What is love for if it is not to believe, not to shield and protect? If you were ten times the Shepherd's daughter it would make no difference. I know you are stainless. If there is any smirch upon your parentage, which I do not believe, there is none upon you. What kind of man do you think my father is—or I am? Come."

He stood up, his arms open. She dropped her head on her arms. Then she raised a tear-stained face.

"No," she said, resolutely. "Not with the perpetual fear in my heart of something that might kill our happiness. It would choke love. If I could come, Jimmy"—there was a pitiful little catch in her voice as she spoke his name that made him step toward her but she shrank back—"if I could come—I would."

The door opened and Tezah hobbled swiftly in.

"The sheriff, señor. They are coming."

Jimmy jumped to the veranda. His field glasses hung against the wall. He focussed them on the rapidly moving dots. Five men were riding swiftly toward the ranch. A fleck of flame flashed from the badge on the breast of the one in the lead.

He ran back into the room.

"It's too late to try and get away," he said. "That is my fault, Deborah. Go upstairs."

His imperative tone startled her but she obeyed. He swept the table of the evidence of three having made a meal, putting the extra dishes into a cupboard in the kitchen. Deborah's hat with its sun veil about it was on the sideboard. He opened the innerdoor and tossed it up the stairs. Deborah was on the upper landing.

"They are here, señor," whispered Tezah.

He made a warning gesture to the girl and took his place at the table, filling his pipe. Tezah he motioned to a chair by the stove. As the men rode up outside he suddenly remembered the counterfeit double-eagle in his pocket and, taking off the stove lid, dropped it into the redwood ashes, turning to the door as the sheriff knocked.

"Come in," he cried.

The sheriff of San Juan County came in, his spurs clinking, two revolvers swung forward on his hips. He was tall, black-eyed and black-haired, hawk-nosed above a trailing moustache.

"Mornin'," he said with a pleasantness that did not disguise his businesslike manner. "You folks breakfastin'? Kind of late, ain't ye? Or is it early luncheon?"

"Breakfast," said Jimmy. "Up last night with the goats. Trouble with the kidding. Will you sit in? I can get something in a jiffy."

"Thanks, no," said the sheriff, drily. "There's quite a crowd of us."

"Have a cup of coffee."

Jimmy thought he might gauge the other's friendliness or hostility by the offer but he used it as a cover under which to watch the sheriff's keen glance that swept the room from ceiling to floor, resting for the fraction of a second on an object that made Jimmy's jaws clamp. It was a leather glove, palm up, just under the table, Deborah's glove, far too small for any pretence of male ownership. The sheriff's glance passed on. He refused the coffee but took a chair, leaning forward in apparent confidence.

"Know much about your neighbours?" he asked.

"The Curly O?"

Jimmy patted himself mentally for the delightfully casual tone he produced.

He was perfectly cool in the face of Deborah's danger and felt a keen pleasure in the game now forward in which the sheriff had moved the first pawn.

"Not much. I traded goat for beef once but they didn't seem to like my company and I felt the same way about it."

"Ah! Who did you see?"

"Old man Dane, his son, and a couple of other men."

"No girl?"

Jimmy looked at him with eyes frank beyond question.

"Nothing feminine on the horizon."

And as he blandly lied, he remembered the print gown he had seen blowing on the line at the Curly O.

"Ah! So you didn't like 'em? You showed good judgment. Your name's Hollister, ain't it?"

"Jimmy Hollister. Goatman."

"I've heard about your goats. You're a friend of Jimmy Amber, ain't you? Well, he's a friend of mine. And I'm inclined to be a friend of any friend of his. You *sabe*?"

Jimmy *sabe'd* the emphasis on the "inclined" and nodded.

"You're well rid of your neighbours, Hollister. I've got two of 'em outside."

He looked at Jimmy with hard, shrewd eyes that failed to find a blench.

"They're going a long ways. I'm startin' 'em. I thought maybe you might have seen the girl. She's pretty, I understand. The whole crowd of 'em have been mixed up in counterfeiting with a chap named Stimpson. Old man Dane, as you call him—we call him the Shepherd."

He paused.

"So Amber told me," said Jimmy. He did

not know how much the sheriff might have learned of his life before he came to Aztec and he resolved that a little honesty was the best policy.

"The Shepherd has been 'shoving the queer' for a long time. He's dodged 'round pretty clever from place to place till he found this hide-out. The stuff he turned out was first class. We found a lot of it buried on his ranch yesterday before we rounded them up in the cañon."

Jimmy wondered if that was all they had unearthed and he thought of the gold-piece safely in the stove but he said nothing.

"Stimpson came up here with a Chinaman," went on the sheriff. "He's disappeared. So has the Chink, and there's another missing, one of the two you saw on the ranch. I fancy Stimpson had wind of trouble. He skipped out from his place near Colorado Springs in a hurry. If he warned 'em, some of 'em may have got clear. The Shepherd took his bunch down cañon to cache the outfit, I reckon. There was no moulds or furnace at the ranch. But they stayed too long on the job. Had some sort of a row between themselves, I fancy. One of 'em fired a shot that gave 'em away and another answered it. Sounded like rifle and revolver. Brought us up on the jump."

He talked abstractedly as if to himself, tugging

at the long ends of his moustache. Jimmy hid his relief. He had been afraid that the sheriff might look too closely into the firing the posse must have overheard.

"The girl may have got clear with Stimpson and the others," he continued, musingly.

Then his eyes narrowed and flashed while his beaklike nose seemed to project itself from his face as he snapped out:

"Amber didn't tell me you was married!"

If he had not seen the glove Jimmy might have winced at the sudden thrust.

"He didn't, eh?" he answered, nonchalantly. "That's funny."

"Where is she?"

The sheriff's friendliness had slipped from him like a cloak.

"Upstairs, I suppose. Cleaning up."

"I'd like to see her."

Jimmy could do nothing but produce Deborah. If she had stayed on the landing she could have heard everything. Undoubtedly she had. On that he staked the throw.

"I'll call her," he said, and walked to the door conscious of the sheriff's eyes following his slightest action.

"Honey!"

"I'm coming," she answered.

Jimmy stared at her in amazement as she came lightly down the stairs. The travel-stained, weary girl had been metamorphosed into a trim housewife. She had contrived an apron, her sleeves were rolled above her shapely elbows, and her eyes were alight with excitement.

She stood in the doorway, the picture of a somewhat shy ranch mistress, a little puzzled at the visit, a little perturbed at the condition of her house. The sheriff looked at her admiringly but keenly. The fingers of her left hand were outside the jamb of the door. Jimmy's spirit sank. He knew those fingers were ringless and the sheriff was unostentatiously yet visibly waiting for their appearance. He forestalled Jimmy's introduction.

"Just a minute," he said. "Are you Mrs. Hollister, ma'am?"

It seemed minutes to Jimmy before she spoke. Her look of surprise was perfect.

"Were you trying to disown me, Jimmy?" she asked.

"Not me, honey, I'm too proud of you."

She dimpled. The sheriff looked from one to the other, his face shadowed with perplexity. Tezah stood stolid by the stove. Deborah's hand came down from the door. Jimmy could not keep his eyes from it. She fussed at her hair with it and his eyes bulged. There was a hoop of gold on the

wedding finger. He turned to the officer to make an introduction.

"This is Sheriff——"

"Trainer. At your service, ma'am."

He took the hand that the girl extended.

"I'll be goin' now," he said. "Just dropped in for a chat with your husband."

He went to the door and whirled suddenly. The look on the faces of the psuedo Mr. and Mrs. Hollister brought tension to his brows.

"Bring in those two," he ordered through the doorway.

Jimmy looked through the window. The Shepherd and his son Ben, handcuffed, were getting stiffly off of their horses. They had been brought up here to face him. The sheriff was suspicious of the young goatman despite the recommendation of Amber's friendship. Deborah's presence had complicated matters.

A deputy sheriff, rifle in hand, herded the two prisoners into the house. A second stood guard by the horses. As they passed the window Ben Dane's face turned toward him and to Jimmy's amazement one eye deliberately winked at him in a friendly signal.

"Now then," said the sheriff, crisply. "Do you know these men, Mrs. Hollister?"

He stood watching her, an umpire of the law.

For a second Deborah seemed to falter as she looked at the Shepherd. The false philanthropy of Dane's face had departed. He appeared what he was, an evil old man with shifting eyes in which craft had given place to a crestfallen cowardice tinged with malice.

"Why—they belong across the cañon, don't they?" she said.

"Since you make it a question, ma'am," said Trainer, "they did, but now they belong to Cañon City."

The deputy chuckled at the grim joke in the mention of the penitentiary city. His superior turned sharply on the prisoners.

"Ever see this lady before?" he asked them. "Speak up."

The Shepherd's beard waggled as he started to answer. Jimmy's nails sank deep into his palms. Then he saw Ben Dane kick his father deliberately and cruelly on the ankle. The Shepherd changed his involuntary groan into a cough.

"Not to speak to," said the younger Dane. "I reckon she's the goatman's wife. See here, Sheriff, what's the idea of dragging us all over the country like a couple of bears on a string? This ain't a circus. I ain't squealing. I know when I'm up against it and I'll take my medicine"—he spoke the words straight at Jimmy—"but I

ain't no exhibition freak. The goatman don't know anything about us. We told him long ago to keep off the ranch for reasons you can guess.

"His wife never saw my sister, if that's what you're aiming at. And my sister's too slick for you to catch. She made her getaway hours ago with Stimpson and the rest of 'em. We stayed behind to get rid of the outfit. Trouble was we stayed too long. We got into an argument. And you settled it. You've got the goods on us and if you'll take us down cañon I'll show you where we buried it. Then quit playing barker to this sideshow and take us in. I want to get rid of these bracelets."

He was back of the sheriff, between him and the deputy, and he grinned at Jimmy and Deborah, a grin destitute of malice, the outward and visible sign of his inherent chivalry that forced its way through the prime crust of his spirit now that, for him, the game was over and lost.

And Jimmy had won. Trainer's face cleared.

"That's all I wanted to know," he said. "We'll go and get that outfit. Sorry to have disturbed you, ma'am. Come on."

Jimmy drew Deborah's arm within his and they stood on the veranda as the quintet rode away.

"I always had a sneaking liking for Ben Dane," he said. "He killed Stimpson but it was a fair

fight and he shot after Stimpson started it. We'll not meddle in that. As for you, Deborah, you were wonderful."

She withdrew her arm and spoke gravely:

"I heard everything you two said. I did what I could."

She stood a little apart from him, twisting the ring about her finger.

"It was that ring that really convinced Trainer," said Jimmy. "Where did you get it?"

"It was my mother's, the only thing I ever had of hers. I have always worn it 'round my neck."

She took it off and passed it to him. On the inside was engraved:

Forever. 1894.

He took her hand and tried to replace the circlet.

"Let it stay where it is, Deborah," he pleaded. "Until it really means what it stood for just now."

She shook her head at him, all the light gone out of her face, very pale now despite its golden tan. Very small and frail she looked, thought Jimmy, as she brought up a thin gold chain from her neck and snapped on the ring. His own eyes grew firmly tender and the bone in his jaw showed tight against the lean flesh of his chin.

"I am not at all sure that you have the right to do that," he said.

Deborah gasped, backing against the wall of the house.

"What do you mean?"

"You have acknowledged yourself as my wife before witnesses. In some states, particularly in the West, that is considered binding. If it is, I'll hold you to it."

Her face grew rosy red at his mastery. Her soul crept up to her eyes and looked at him, wistful, admiring, and adorably shy. Then she turned and fled into the house.

CHAPTER XIX

YOU SABE?

LATE that afternoon Hollister and Deborah arrived in Floravista on Solo and Tezah's pony. Jimmy feared the risk of someone in Aztec recognizing Deborah as connected with the Curly O. The northbound train was due in two hours. He purchased tickets for the junction point to Denver and made arrangements to send the horses back to Tezah with a man he hired to stay with the chief as an assistant until they returned to superintend the development of the Aco mine.

Then he found the doctor's office of the little farming community, feed him, and obtained his promise to go to the ranch and attend to Tezah's wound. There was little danger, but he did not feel inclined to stint his gratitude.

"We'll get something to eat," he said, as they walked down the street.

Farmers' rigs and motors lined it and there was an air of prosperous bustle about the place, but no undue excitement. The news of the arrest had not reached Floravista. Deborah walked de-

murely by his side, acquiescing in all he suggested, or rather, ordered, with an air of proprietorship that appeared to work its desired effect upon the girl.

Next to the restaurant was a Chinese laundry. Jimmy looked casually through the window. He stopped short, catching at Deborah's arm.

"Come in here a minute," he said.

Wonderingly, she followed him. A Chinaman turned from an ironing-board, his onyx eyes gleaming. It was Ah Fung.

"How do, Misteh Hollistey, how do, missy?" he said. "You come along me in back. One man he likee see you. Evellything all light. Bettah we talk lilly while. Evellything all light, you *sabe*," he reiterated as Jimmy hesitated.

The rest of the laundrymen looked at them unconcernedly as Ah Fung opened the door in the rear of the store. A smell of cooking gushed out. The homely odour of onions seemed strangely reassuring. More so was a window that faced the door and looked on to the back of a livery barn. A man was washing a buggy. Jimmy had his automatic with him. An alarm could easily be heard. Ah Fung's manner held promise of worthwhile news.

"We've plenty of time, Deborah, let's go in," he said.

There was a stove in the room with pots upon it and a table by the window. Two walls were lined with bunks. In one of them lay a man whose face seemed the paler for an unshaven beard. It was Jerry, the man that Hollister had wounded, and, later, succoured. His eyes opened with recognition that turned to eager inquiry. Ah Fung shut the door to the laundry.

"He get well pletty soon," he said. "China doctah he fix him plenty good. Mebbe you tell us some news. Bimeby we talk."

"I can't stay long," warned Jimmy.

He briefly told them of the arrest of the Shepherd and Ben Dane and the shooting of the third man. He said nothing of the siege in the cañon, leaving that to be inferred, nor did he mention the mine. Jerry listened avidly and Ah Fung's head nodded like that of a porcelain idol.

"All light," he said. "They no catch us. Me got plenty fliend here. Bimeby we go San Francisco. Suppose any time someone speak I no *sabe*. I just cook for Stimpson. He dead. No can talk. Jelly, he no talk. You *sabe*?"

"I *sabe*," said Jimmy. "We are going away, too. How did you get away?"

"In the automobile," said Jerry. "I've got no grudge against you, Hollister. You did more for me than the Shepherd. I reckon you fixed me

up so I wouldn't freeze. I thought so," he went on, after Jimmy's affirmative nod. "The Danes have got theirs. I'm coming out at the big end, thanks to the Chink. No use talking too much about anything. I'm going to travel on the square when I get out to California. Stimpson's in his grave and if you're agreeable we'll bury the whole thing with him."

"That goes," said Jimmy. "Need any money?"

The sick man's eyes glowed gratefully.

"Can you spare it? It would help."

Jimmy peeled off fifty dollars from his roll, the proceeds from the sale of his kids.

"I can spare that much. You're welcome. We've found out that Miss Deborah is not Dane's daughter," he said with a sudden inspiration, "do you know anything about it?"

Deborah gave a little cry and clasped her hands. Jimmy swiftly realized that the news, if there was any, might not be welcome. But if that mystery could be cleared, it should be, he decided.

"Why, I've always calculated that none of my business," said Jerry, slowly. "I've known it for quite a while, but as long as Dane wanted folks to think she was his daughter I didn't feel called on to interfere. I could see things was going to explain 'emself sooner or later when Ben started to get sweet on her—beggin' your pardon, miss.

"Your father"—he addressed himself to the eager, trembling girl—"wasn't any of our gang. He was a pardner of Dane's twenty-five years ago. It was a mining deal. A good one. I guess it was the only straight thing the Shepherd ever got mixed up in.

"Your dad was a mining engineer and he'd figured out a way to handle the ore that the rest of 'em had given up. I ain't sure about details. Ben told me one night ten years ago when we was off together on a time in Chicago. He was drunk or he wouldn't have talked.

"Anyhow your dad was killed in the mine. Shafting timbers gave way. Your mother died soon after she got the news. Seems like she was sickly from your bein' born, miss. The mine proposition petered out with no one to handle it right. If it had turned out O. K. mebbe the Shepherd would have gone straight. He adopted you and sent you to school as he promised your dad when he was dyin'.

"I wouldn't over-credit him with that. He was a gambler and he played you for mascot. If he'd gone back on his word to a dyin' man his luck would leave him. He's a bad one. Ben's different. He's rough but he ain't a bad sort. I reckon he figured Ah Fung would look out for me.

"I've always had a hunch from what Ben said

that the Shepherd was sweet on your mother, miss. Anyways, Ben said he'd never talk about her."

"What was my father's name?" asked Deborah, her face radiant.

Jerry looked at her blankly.

"Lord, miss, it's plumb gone out of my head."

"Oh! Think! Please try to think."

He stared at her, his eyes puzzled.

"I'm tryin' to, miss, tryin' my best. It begun with H, seems to me. It had something to do with mines—something to do with the mine turning out right. They was goin' to call it after him. The Last Hope? No, that ain't it. Somethin' like it, though. Meant about the same thing."

"Was it Hazard?" suggested Jimmy.

"By God, you've hit it. Hazard! That's it." He raised himself on his elbows in his excitement. "Julian Hazard. I'll tell you, miss. We've got it sure to kingdom. He got his M. E. from the Boulder School of Mines. Like enough you can trace him up from there. Julian Hazard!"

Deborah bent over him with a beaming face.

"You don't know what that means to me, Jerry," she said.

"Or to me, Jerry," repeated Jimmy, catching Deborah's hand.

Ah Fung stood in the background like a beneficent Buddha.

"Pletty good you see me. Pletty good you come in."

Deborah whispered to Jimmy.

"Look here, Jerry," he said. "This news is worth a lot to us. I am going to be able to well afford it and if you want to go straight, you send me your address in California—write to me at Aztec and I'll get it—and I'll stake you to a good start. Enough to get some land and stock you up as a rancher. What do you say to it? And I'll not forget your share in it, Ah Fung, if you'll let me know where I can find you."

"I think you one damn good chap," said Ah Fung after Jerry had stammered his thanks and protestation of reform. "You take this, missy. Velly good luck!"

He turned and knelt in front of a quaint chest lacquered in red and bound in brass, unlocking it with a key on a string concealed by his blouse. He took out a bracelet of carven gray stone and another smaller object.

"This leal jade," he said, presenting the hoop to Deborah. "Look pletty on ahm. Bimeby plenty good for lilee baby to make teeth glow. This good luck, too."

He handed Jimmy a disc of gold on which a Chinese ideograph was raised.

"This you all same keep in pocket," he said.

"Mebbe put on watch chain. This mean good luck, plenty health, plenty happy, plenty money. All same mascot. Suppose you play poken all same you win—evelly time. This leal gold," he ended with a grin. "Not like money they make in cañon!"

As they reached the street Jimmy found Deborah's hand still in his. He released it as she blushed.

"That breaks down your last argument, Deborah," he said. "We'll trace your father from the School of Mines. The books will show his home town. We can go there and look up your folks. We'll do it on our honeymoon."

"But—"

"That word is taboo from now on. We'll argue it out on the way to Denver. Meantime, romancers to the contrary, I'm starving. We've just time to get a bite to eat before the train leaves."

CHAPTER XX

CAPRICORN LIMITED

THEY had an anxious minute or so while the train stopped at Aztec but there was no sign of the sheriff or his prisoners. As the engine gathered speed they sat side by side in the day coach gazing at the upslope of the plateau split by Turquoise Cañon. The sunset sky had faded to the green of the turquoise matrix in Jimmy's pocket. Against it, silhouetted in purple black, they caught a glimpse of Diablo. Deborah's hand was already snuggled in his between them on the seat, decorously hidden from the sight of the passengers who all seemed to sense the aura of their happiness. He pressed it and his blood raced until it tingled in his veins at the response.

Night fell and a moon rose and tossed splinters of itself into the racing torrent of the Rio Las Animas. It was ten o'clock when they reached Durango where the branch came in from Pagosa Junction. This was the destination of their accommodation train and Jimmy, at first with dismay, then with glowing joy, discovered that there

was no train to Denver until the next morning. He returned to Deborah with a look in his face that made her clutch the iron arms of the waiting-room seat.

"What is it?" she asked.

"The last train's gone and you and I are going to find a minister. We've got the ring."

"But——"

"Word forbidden. Argument ruled out. Come on."

He swept her along, breathless, up the slope of the road that led to the lights of the town. Suddenly she stopped.

"Jimmy Hollister, I won't. I haven't any clothes. I won't be married in these. I can't."

"Neither have I. What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. Hang the *trousseau*! This is a question of propriety, Deborah!"

The station buses had passed them. The road was deserted. The moon had dropped behind the range and the light of the stars seemed discreetly dimmed. He took her in his arms and kissed her upturned, expostulating face.

"But, Jimmy," she said, "I must use 'but.' It's a woman's privilege. You are a darling—there's someone coming—but you are stupid. You don't understand. I simply won't marry you until I've gone shopping!"

They turned the shoulder of the mounting road and the main street of Durango lay before them in a comparative blaze of lights.

"Glory be!" cried Jimmy. "I'm an ass. Durango is a twenty-four-hour town. The stores keep open for the day shifts. Go on and do your shopping. Here's the Silver City Emporium. I'm to wait outside, I suppose?"

"Certainly, sir. You may smoke a cigar if you like."

"Cigar? I had forgotten there were such things. Hurry up! Here's something you'll need."

He put the roll of bills in her hand and watched her as she entered, light and buoyant. The cigar passed from his mind as he paced impatiently up and down, multiplying the minutes into hours by the inverse ratios of love.

"Jimmy!"

He turned from the window. Amber stood before him by the side of an erect figure at the sight of which Jimmy leaped forward.

"Dad! The last person in the world I thought to see—and the best. What brings you here?"

Father and son wrung hands while the goatman tugged at his goatee.

"The business that brought me West fizzled out, Jimmy," said his father. "I wired Amber from Denver to Pagosa. No answer, so I telephoned.

They told me he was at Durango at a convention. Down I came, pulled him out of a caucus, and persuaded him to take me down to your place. No train till to-morrow, though."

"Didn't need persuadin'," said Amber. "I was goin' anyway. Sort of uneasy, way things was headin' when I left. What are we standin' outside here for? Let's go to the hotel and celebrate while we talk it over."

"Can't be done," said Jimmy. "I'm waiting for my wife."

"Your wife?"

The clear-cut face of Hollister, Sr., lengthened in bewilderment.

"Your what?"

"Wife! Or will be as soon as we can find a minister. You're just in time to give her away."

Amber slapped him on the back.

"Jumping rattlesnakes!" he cried. "It's Dane's girl."

"No," said Jimmy.

Amber's countenance relapsed into a ludicrous blank.

"No?" he repeated.

"Her name's Hazard. Deborah Hazard. She wasn't Dane's daughter at all. I'll tell you all about it later, dad. This is my busy evening. Here she is. You are going to love her to death.

If I didn't marry her to-night I'd be jealous of you to-morrow."

Deborah had bought a travelling suit of blue serge, which by the miracle of a "perfect thirty-six" fitted her to perfection. Her hat was a turban beneath which her hair gleamed like red gold. A clerk followed her with bundles. She hesitated at the sight of Jimmy's companions.

"It's all right, Deborah. It's my father."

Hollister Sr.'s face was a trifle grim and a little cynical as the girl timidly advanced. He spoke in kindly fashion.

"My boy tells me you are going to make him happy."

Deborah looked up and smiled and Jimmy, from his own experience, knew that the elder generation of the Hollister household had capitulated.

In the drawing room of the Denver Limited the next day Jimmy had a confidential conference with his father.

"I hate to inject bad news into your honeymoon, my boy," he said. "I had hoped to have been able to treat you generously when you married but things have gone awry with me of late. These war times have upset the usual order of things. I would not touch the munitions end of it and my neutrality has proved expensive. I may have to

come and live with you and Deborah on that ranch of yours. Is there much money in goats?" he asked, whimsically. "It may not be as bad as all that," he added. "If I knew where I could get hold of some more capital I might——"

"Capital?" interrupted Jimmy. "Why, I can provide that. I haven't told you anything about Tezah and the mine in Turquoise Cañon. Goats are only a by-product. Deborah and I are rich. Wait——"

He went out to the observation car where Mrs. Hollister, Jr., was chatting with Amber until her liege lord finished his talk with his father. He took them both back with him to the drawing room, opened his grip, and produced the specimens of turquoise matrix and free gold.

"Now, then," he said. "We'll form the company. Amber, you're in on this, on the ground floor."

"I am, am I? Why? What you going to call it, anyway?" asked Amber.

"Capricorn Limited."

Presently, when Amber and Hollister, Sr., had discreetly retired, Deborah asked the question that had been trembling on her lips all morning.

"Your father—does he like me, Jimmy?"

"He told me that my choice of you had convinced him of two things: That I had inherited his own tastes and that my wisdom teeth must be entirely developed."

"And you, Jimmy?"

"You see that pine forest, Deborah, covering the ridge? If every seed in every cone should grow into a tree and all that forest was made into timber, it would not furnish planks enough to make the lid for a chest large enough to contain a tithe of the love I hold for you."

It was a fantastic metaphor, even for the morning after marriage, but to Deborah, as she snuggled in his arms with a sigh of utter content, it was eminently satisfactory.

THE END



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